PARTISAN REVIEW

AUGUST, 1948

THE STATE OF AMERICAN WRITING, 1948: A Symposium

JOHN BERRYMAN · R. P. BLACKMUR · ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS · LESLIE A. FIEDLER CLEMENT GREENBERG · H. L. MENCKEN JOHN CROWE RANSOM · WALLACE STEVENS LIONEL TRILLING

NICOLA CHIAROMONTE
Malraux and the Demons of Action (II)

PEGGY BENNETT
The Pawn (a story)

HORACE GREGORY
The Beggar on the Beach

ISAAC ROSENFELD
Slave Labor and Western Horror

ELIZABETH HARDWICK
Graham Greene and the Love of Sin

8

50c

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Study of Literature

FOR READERS AND CRITICS

In this keenly written and soundly conceived volume David Daiches, Professor of English in Cornell University, discusses the basic function and purpose of imaginative prose and poetry. *252 pages, $2.75.*

American Vanguard

Edited by Don M. Wolfe of the New School for Social Research, these selections from the pens of men and women in the writers' workshop at the New School are examples of modern writing with its detached compassion and attention to detail. *351 pages, $3.50.*

Writers for Tomorrow

These stories were selected from manuscripts submitted in creative writing courses at Cornell. The authors are young men and women in their twenties, seeking to interpret their times. Baxter Hathaway, Assistant Professor of English in Cornell, edited the book. *236 pages, $2.75.*

The Idiom of Poetry

Relative aesthetic and absolute moral standards of criticism are upheld in this stimulating series of essays by Frederick A. Pottle, Sterling Professor of English in Yale University. ". . . logically reasoned, thought-provoking." —*Johnsonian News Letter. 250 pages, $2.50.*

Writers and Their Critics

The failure of critics to recognize contemporary works of genius is entertainingly and devastatingly set forth in this original and useful book by Henri Peyre, Sterling Professor of French in Yale University. *340 pages, $3.00.*

Order from Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York

Cornell University Press

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ABEL AGEE ANDERSON AUDEN BELLOW BERRYMAN BLACKMUR

BISHOP BOGAN BRAUNSCHWEIG

BURNHAM CLARK CHIAROMONTE

CUMMINGS DEWEY DOS PASSOS

DUPEE ELIOT FARRELL GIDE

FEARING FITZGERALD JOLAS

GARRIGUE GOODMAN HORTON

GREENBERG GREGORY JACKSON

HOOK KAFKA KAPLAN LOWELL

MACDONALD MacNEICE MOORE

McCARTHY MORRIS PHILLIPS

NAGEL PORTER ROSENFELD

WHEELWRIGHT WILSON WRIGHT

JARRELL SYLANDER VIGNERON

RODGERS TROY SYPHER ZABEL

THE PARTISAN READER

1934 - 44

edited by
William Phillips
and
Philip Rahv

This 700 page anthology contains the best work published in Partisan Review in its first ten years, some of the finest writing in the modern period: twelve stories, a large selection of poetry, and of cultural, social, and literary criticism.

"No regular reader of Partisan Review will be surprised by the excellence of the anthology."
—Saturday Review of Literature

"The most serious collection now available."
—New York Times

RAHV ROSENBERG SHAPIRO SHUBERT STEIN STEVENS SWEENEY TATE

SCHWARTZ SCHAPIRO SILONE SPENDER

WILLIAMS TRILLING THOMAS

special combination offer

The Partisan Reader retail price $3.75
and one year of PR regular price $5.00

total $8.75
Both for $5.50

name .....

street .....

city..... zone..... state.....

PARTISAN REVIEW, 1545 Broadway, N. Y. 19

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A YOGI

by

PARAMHANSA YOGANANDA

Preface by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz M.A., D.Litt., D.Sc.

The life story of one of the world's great spiritual leaders, written with a depth and sincerity rarely found in modern writings.

"I am grateful to you for granting me some insight into this fascinating world." **Thomas Mann**

"Autobiography of A Yogi is a fascinating and clearly annotated study of a religious way of life, ingenuously described in the lush style of the Orient." **Newsweek**

"This is indeed a wonderful book of inestimable worth. It ranks with writings regarded as "sacred" since it offers knowledge and wisdom to the seeker." **London Modern Mystic and Monthly Science Review**

"A rare account." **New York Times**

Being translated into eight languages

$3.50 Postpaid 500 pp.
32 pp. of unusual photographs
California residents add 11c sales tax

Dept. 6
SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP
3880 San Rafael Avenue
Los Angeles 31, Calif.

CONTRIBUTORS

PEGGY BENNETT, author of "The Varmints," a first novel, now lives in New York City.

JOHN BERRYMAN, whose book of poems "The Dispossessed," appeared this spring, will teach at Princeton in the fall.

R. P. BLACKMUR, well-known critic and poet, is in the English Department of Princeton University.

NICOLA CHIAROMONTE, whose work has frequently appeared in **PR** and in **Politics,** is now in Rome.

ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS teaches writing and contemporary literature at Smith College.

LESLIE A. FIEDLER, who teaches at Montana State University, is a regular contributor to **PR.**

JOHN CROWE RANSOM, poet and critic, is the editor of **The Kenyon Review.**

LIONEL TRILLING, novelist and critic, is currently at work on a new novel.

HAROLD KAPLAN, not to be confused with H. J. Kaplan, our regular Paris correspondent, teaches at Rutgers University.

The frontispiece by **Juan Gris** is reproduced by the courtesy of the Kleeman Gallery, New York. The size of the original is 9½" by 12".

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW DIRECTIONS BOOKS

new titles | recent successes

TWO PLAYS by albert camus

Authorized English translations of "Caligula" and "Le Malentendu" —two dramas with intensely exciting plots and a deep philosophical significance. ($3.00)

ON THE MARBLE CLIFFS by ernst juenger

Unquestionably the most extraordinary book to come out of Germany in recent years. ($3.00)

THE OTHER HOUSE by henry james

An undeservedly neglected novel in which the master writes of murder! ($3.00)

SPEARHEAD anthology

An historical survey collection of ten years of experimental writing in America. ($5.00)

ORPHEUS english anthology

A yearbook of all the arts & letters in England and Western Europe. A large and handsome volume with many illustrations. ($4.50)

THE MEMORIAL by christopher isherwood

A deeply moving story of the disintegration of a middle-class English family. ($2.75)

THE CLASSICAL MOMENT by martin turnell

A study of French literature in the golden age of Racine, Corneille and Molière. ($4.50)

THREE TRAGEDIES by garcia lorca

Translations of *Yerma, Blood Wedding* and *Bernarda Alba* by Richard O'Connell and James Graham-Lujan. ($3.75)

NEW DIRECTIONS, 500 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PR PARTISAN REVIEW

EDITORS:
William Phillips, Philip Rahv

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
William Barrett, Delmore Schwartz

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER:
Mary Wickware

ASSISTANT BUSINESS MANAGER:
Rosamund Reed

ADVISORY BOARD:
James Burnham, Allan D. Dowling, Sidney Hook,
James Johnson Sweeney, Lionel Trilling

PARTISAN REVIEW is published monthly by Added Enterprises at 1545 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Subscriptions: $5 a year, $8 for two years; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $6 a year, $10 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $0.50. In Canada: $0.60. (Sole distributors of PARTISAN REVIEW in Canada: Jonathan David Company.) Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright August, 1948, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Reentered as second-class matter, January 9, 1948, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AUGUST, 1948 VOLUME XV, NUMBER 8

CONTENTS

FRONTISPIECE, Still Life, Juan Gris

THE STATE OF AMERICAN WRITING, 1948:
A SYMPOSIUM: John Berryman, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Gorham Davis, Leslie A. Fiedler, Clement Greenberg, John Crowe Ransom, Wallace Stevens, Lionel Trilling, H. L. Mencken 855

THE LIVES (a poem), Weldon Kees 894

THE BEGGAR ON THE BEACH (a poem), Horace Gregory 895

CAPTAIN CONSCIENCE (a poem), Harold Kaplan 896

THE PAWN (a story), Peggy Bennett 898

MALRAUX AND THE DEMONS OF ACTION (II), Nicola Chiaromonte 912

REVIEWS

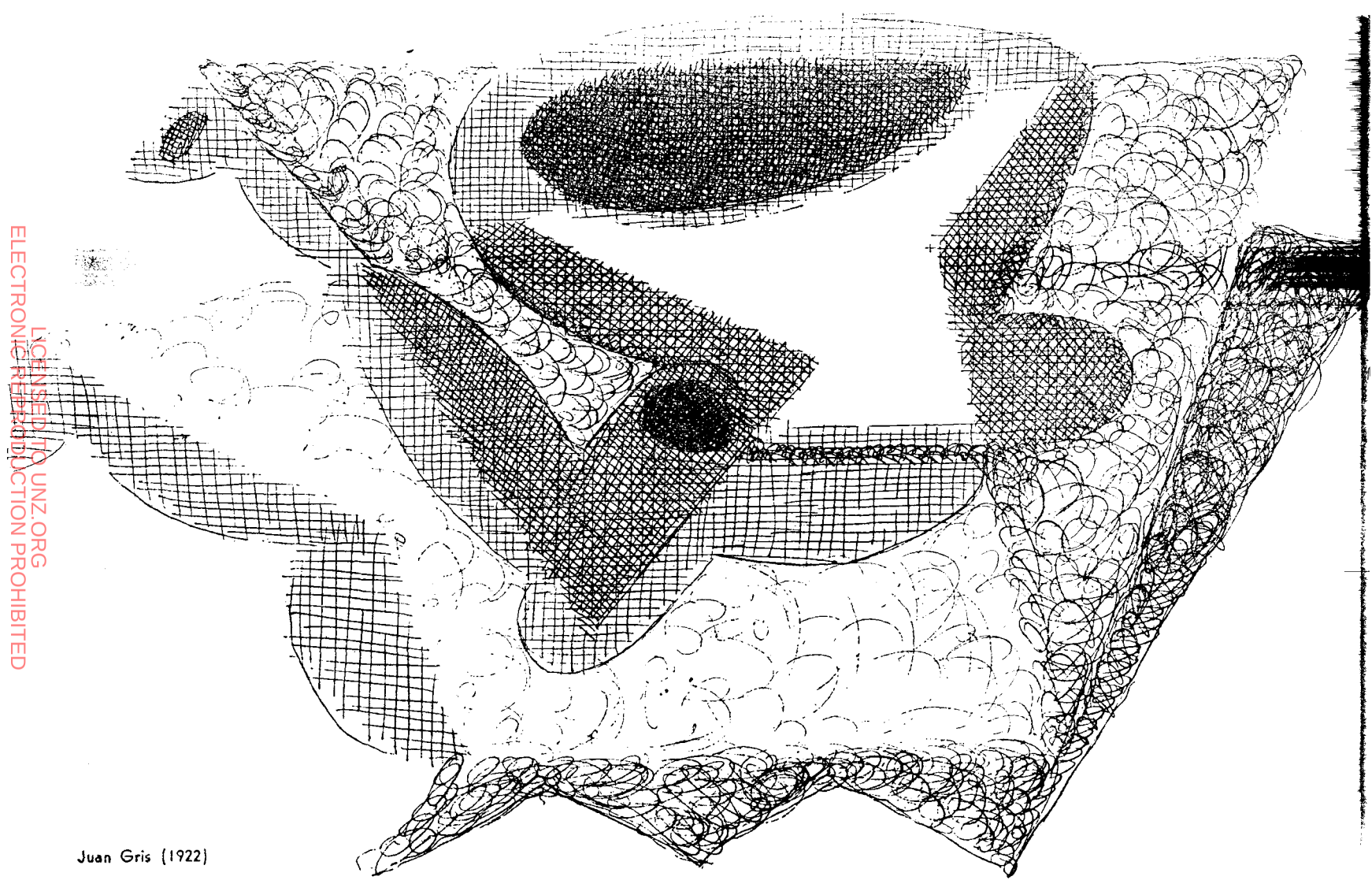
SOME USES AND FAILURES OF FEELING, Leslie A. Fiedler 924

SOVIET SLAVE LABOR AND WESTERN HORROR, Isaac Rosenfeld 932

LOVELESS LOVE, Elizabeth Hardwick 937

CORRESPONDENCE 940

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Juan Gris (1922)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STATE OF AMERICAN WRITING, 1948: SEVEN QUESTIONS

We are publishing below some of the replies to a questionnaire submitted to a group of American writers. The questions follow:

1. *What, in your opinion, are the new literary tendencies or figures, if any, that have emerged in the forties? How does the literary atmosphere of this decade compare with that of the thirties? In what way, too, does the present period differ from the first postwar period? Can the differences between the two postwar periods be defined in relation to the European situation?*
2. *Do you think that American middlebrow culture has grown more powerful in this decade? In what relation does this middlebrow tendency stand to serious writing—does it threaten or bolster it?*
3. *What is the meaning of the literary revivals (James, Forster, Fitzgerald, etc.) that have taken place of late? Is this a publishing phenomenon or is it an organic literary interest in the sense that the rediscovered writers of the past are in some way truly expressive of current literary needs?*
4. *It is the general opinion that, unlike the twenties, this is not a period of experiment in language and form. If that is true, what significance can be attached to this fact? Does present writing base itself on the earlier experimentation, in the sense that it has creatively assimilated it, or can it be said that the earlier experimentation came to a dead end?*
5. *In the twenties most writers were free-lancers, whereas now many make their living by teaching in universities. Has this change affected the tone and mood of literature in our time? Can it with justice be said that American writing has grown more academic since the twenties?*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

6. *In recent decades serious literary criticism has shown a special bent for the analysis and interpretation of poetry. What is the significance of this concentration at a time when poetry itself has had an ever-diminishing audience? Would literature benefit from a critical concern, equally intense, with other genres of writing? In our time, when the fate of culture as a whole is called into question, does the basic meaning of the literary effort stand in need of re-examination?*
7. *What is the effect on American writing of the growing tension between Soviet Communism and the democraitc countries? How are cultural interests affected by this struggle and do you think a writer should involve himself in it (as writer? as person?) to the point of commitment?*

John Berryman:

The questions are interesting, and I take them all, with one or two prefatory remarks. The forties are, of course, not over yet, and are not comparable anyway, as a "postwar" period, with the twenties; in relation to the end of open warfare, 1948 is only 1921—to say nothing of the sluggish influence of what is called the "cold war." If therefore we do not see flashing about us yet the novelists we would like to set against Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, we needn't weep with chagrin. Since the story has in general to be very gloomy, it is worth remembering also an inevitable lag; a number of the poems, for instance, with which Eliot raised hell in the twenties, were written by 1910. And the country is a big one, no one can know what is happening everywhere. With these qualifications, and without argument, a few opinions:

1, 2, 4, 5.

It has been a bad decade so far. If the twenties were Eliot's decade, and the thirties Auden's, this has been simply the decade of Survival. Wider military operations, their prolongation, their involvement of civilians, above all the preceding and accompanying genocide, distinguish wholly this war from the last. Everybody lost

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years, and many seem to have lost their nerve. There is a political, perhaps a moral, paralysis. The one movement of interest has been foreign, existentialism, and shows little artistic effect in America. The chief cultural phenomenon of the decade here has probably been the intellectuals' desertion of Marxism. What they have replaced it with, I cannot discover; nihilism is more articulate and impressive than in any other period of which I have knowledge.

In parenthesis, I would remark what seems to me to be a widespread, violent condition of *bad conscience*. Under the patent name of "guilt" we are familiar with this, but then, of course, everybody is "guilty" of everything, and that is that. Bad conscience is more serious. Few men of reflection can be satisfied now with their actions and attitudes during the recent war. Well, we put that aside: the Enemy was clear, and moreover what happened (producing what is happening now) would have happened anyway, "It was done for us" —your modern intellectual is astonishingly fatalistic. This is the view generally taken, with a gain in uneasiness, of the use of the atomic bomb. But few men of reflection can be satisfied with their actions and attitudes *now*. Well, again the Enemy is clear (Stalin for Hitler), what is happening cannot be influenced by us, and so on. That is, men of reflection are reconciled, in their degree, to their past and to their present. The trouble is the future: what they—or what *They* for them—are going to be doing in the months and years and days to come. This is the trouble. In order to be reconciled to *this*, one would have to learn to be reconciled beforehand to an atrocious crime one might well soon commit without having the slightest wish to commit it; and that, I suppose, is out of the question. So that men who can think and are moral must stand ready night and day to the orders of blind evil. What has created this is an usurpation which is not complete: usurpation of individual decision, which yet leaves the individual nominally free—and of course actually free if he happens to be a hero. But literary men are seldom heroes, and heroes of this sort, at present, as soon as they announce themselves, cease anyway to be literary men. It is not a state of mind, this readiness, favorable to writing.

Literary prostitutes and milksops feel it less acutely, and they are thriving. *Of course* American middlebrow culture has grown more powerful in this decade. *Of course* American writing has grown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

increasingly academic since the twenties. But my terms were extravagant—I have nothing against prostitutes, not knowing any, and professors, many of whom are very manly indeed, drink whiskey not milk. No doubt the meretricious in upper-middle-class popular writing (as it apes serious writing), and the spineless in professorial imitations of serious writing, may invite these old-fashioned epithets. But all I intended was an instant's emotion, sign of a conflict that really must be held to exist between serious writers and these other groups. Whether anything can be done about it or not, it is necessary to recognize the conflict.

It is necessary because it is sometimes difficult. Although Authority is one of the two or three points at which literary criticism is just now feeblest, we see in the public, even in its most attentive section, a pathetic over-reliance upon what it conceives to be "authority"—the eagerness for guideposts of a badly educated and swamped-with-writing audience. Among the most influential of these is mere contiguity: what writing is published where. But good writing may be published anywhere at present, and trash may, in a degree of confusion not yet reached in the thirties and not approached earlier. Several things have produced this state of affairs: the death or decline of magazines useful ten years ago, an absence of serious new magazines, inadequate hospitality to new talent by the best continuing magazines, and their inability (until recently they were all very poor) to retain or to print all the work of some of their best contributors as these became well known. The sudden avidity of some high-paying popular magazines, however, for serious writing or what will look as much like it as possible, is what counts most. In the thirties we saw Hemingway in *Esquire*. But he was world-famous. Now they get writers earlier, indeed they try to get them at once, and a brave new talent may be corrupt in the fashion magazines before it can vote. These things are confusing to the young, and not to the young only. Then there is the matter of temptation—which would be merely every writer's own business, if talent were not in truth what it is sometimes called, a "gift," for which one has somehow to be responsible, as best one can.

The alternative to journalism, for most American writers, is teaching, and the dangers from it are similarly complicated. They range from pure slump to pure irritation. To write is hard and takes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the whole mind and wants one's whole time; a university is the perfect place not to write. The irritation is seldom mentioned in print, but matters. Many professors of English cherish (I can't imagine why) unsatisfied literary ambitions—just as most writers do. And then they think writers queer and arrogant, and many writers are. Trouble from all this. And a teacher's audience is always there, and is *so* responsive. Repetition of books and courses numbs. For poets and fiction writers, as for critics, it might be claimed that teaching is valuable because in a seat of learning one keeps on learning. I have no faith in the claim. Writers of any sort certainly ought to know more than they do and as much as possible, but the writers I know outside universities read more, on the whole, more that counts, than those inside. I have no faith in the claim even for critics; and it is not widely enough understood that literary criticism is an activity which bears no necessary relation whatever to good teaching. But the energy used by good teaching is very much the energy required for writing. Finally, the substantial repetition of *experience* involved in teaching, after two or three years, constitutes, for a fiction writer at any rate, the most unsatisfactory life conceivable short of imprisonment. Something can certainly be said for a writer's teaching, but something has, by Blackmur, Stegner, and others: teaching is one way of keeping alive.

The effects of these difficulties are very clear in American writing of the decade, especially of course in recent criticism, which is almost as interesting as fourteen classrooms in one building, all carefully constructed, all empty. It is specially unfortunate, because criticism has in front of it just now a delicate task, namely the exploration of the matter broached in Question 4. The nature of *experiment* in writing wants re-stating, and the return-to-form in poetry during the last ten years wants general study. Now the inevitable bias, in an academic criticism, against "experiment" and in favor of "form," is wretched equipment for this task. In poetry, too, the process of steadying has been assisted—not to its gain—by wide academic instruction in the hands of writers, and the whole transitional period which I think is now coming to an end, perhaps hastened. But I can't enter on these things here.

3. The revivals are "an annoying relief" (as Erich Kahler described to me the telephone strike). It is good to see the authors come

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to fame and familiarity, and it is galling to see them battened on, praised for a hundred qualities they don't possess, mis-selected, made catch-cries. James was inevitable! Forster and Fitzgerald are being over-rated. The question apparently wants me to say that these novelists are being revived mainly because we have no fiction of our own; so I will; but it's obvious. There have been single novels, but the one new writer who looks now to give us book after book that will not disappoint us, and in fact to grow, is Jean Stafford. The amazing cults, as of Kafka and Kierkegaard, are more interesting to me than the revivals. It is the advance of middlebrow culture that has made all these possible, and I read in *Life* that *Don Giovanni* is—oh, just great, great.

6. In the first place, it is not clear that poetry *has* benefited from the intense concentration upon it of modern criticism. There are things that you cannot see with a microscope, for instance you cannot see the sun, and some critics specially devoted to the microscope have therefore argued that the sun does not exist. There are poets who believe whatever they are told, and so the sun disappeared from certain tracts of American verse. One or two extraordinary things, like Robert Lowell's poetry, were helped into existence by some of this criticism, and undoubtedly the general conscience of literate poets improved; but at certain costs.

In the second place, there is something frightening in the notion of a criticism "equally intense" being turned on work much less able to bear it in general than poetry—dialogues, say, travel books, and so on. Could not the criticism be simply more thoughtful, perhaps more learned, perhaps more penetrating, capable of making larger connections? On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the criticism of drama and fiction has something to learn from the criticism of poetry. It has also something to learn—if it liked—from Shakespearian criticism. And criticism of every kind has everything to learn from the science of the mind as that has developed from Freud forward.

To the last part of this question: Yes.

7. "The effect of the tension is" depressing. "Cultural interests are affected" adversely. "The writer should" do any damned thing he can think of to keep on writing, writing well.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. P. Blackmur:

It appears to me that your first three questions have to do with that fraction of the self-elected who write and criticize literature in its relation to the whole society; that your fourth, fifth, and sixth questions have to do with the inner doings of that fraction in relation to their work, when they can get to it; and that your last question, as put, is the swindling chasm which lies between all of us and our work. At any rate, such a division gives a practicable shape to discussion.

My initial assumption is that the elite of writers in America, and so far as I know in other countries, is at present not only self-elected but is also without adequate relation to the forces which shape or deform our culture. (Malraux is only an apparent exception: he represents something that will only be obliterated by the success of the forces with which he allies himself.) There is not even an adequate relation of rebellion. We have instead a vogue for the terms anxiety and euphoria; and we have a growing literary expertness in the techniques of expressing the experience of dismay, and the general techniques for creating the conditions of trouble. With us the role of hero is taken by the impotent, the defective, the psychotic, or by the artist himself. All these are inadequate forms of rebellion. It is neither divine madness nor diabolic; neither inspired nor destructive; it is the anguish of letting go, the agony of the hellish drop, expressed as a kind of taking hold, a struggle in flight. It is as if one's private hysteria were the matrix for public disorder. It is as if we believed the only possible unity and enterprise were those of crisis—against any enemy, for survival. We have a secular world stricken with the mood of religious war. That is an aggravated way of saying how the literary elite responds to its feeling of the actual momentum of society.

Its feeling—its works of art—is what has happened to its culture, not what has happened to society; perhaps only what has happened to the elite itself. In point of fact, society persists—in America with extraordinary buoyancy, in Europe with the ancient tenacity. I see no fellaheen. In the elite (whether literary or not) there is a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

failure of consciousness as to what has also persisted, if only we would recognize it, in the culture of society; and indeed one would think the future of culture (the state of American letters) hopeless did not the writers so well express its present disrepair. They see the risk of spiritual fellaheen everywhere, and, rightly, they see it in the proliferation, in America already, and shortly in Britain, of a new intellectual proletariat; and in their writings they make dramatic prophecy.

I do not know about new literary figures, but it seems to me that there is a new literary tendency and that it comes under the head of this notion of spiritual fellaheen and may be explained (in the sense of diagnosis) as a consequence of inadequate relation between culture and society. What else in their various ways and with the varying degrees of consciousness in their authors are the recent novels of Lionel Trilling, Robert Penn Warren, and Saul Bellow—what else are they about? Why does Robert Lowell call his verse *Lord Weary's Castle,* Randall Jarrell his *The Losses,* John Berryman his *The Dispossessed*? Why do the young rejoice in—seeing analogues in themselves—all those aspects of William Faulkner which cheat or deprive the intelligence? Why is the negative mysticism of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* satisfactory poetry to those who have no positive Christianity at all? Why are the alternatives Ernest Hemingway, Evelyn Waugh, Kenneth Patchen, and Aldous Huxley, if not that each of them, in his own way, reduces the human figures to a muscular, or authoritatively sinful, or apocalyptic, or magical-mystical jelly of principles without values: they are all of them easier to take, than those who hold on to their values no matter what else they let go.

If American middlebrow culture has grown stronger in this decade, I would suppose it was because the bulk of people cannot see themselves reflected in the adventures of the elite, or only so as a pastime, not as a touching possibility. The middlebrow does not want to be dragged through the adventures of his culture; he wants to enjoy it, to escape from it, and to be given the cold dope. His enjoyments and escapes, but not his hankering for cold dope, probably rather bolster than threaten serious writing; his needs keep alive a kind of mechanical competence in the old modes of drama and narrative for the hand of the master when mastery again becomes pos-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sible. Neither O'Neill nor Hemingway by themselves have enough strength. We need the whole ruck of competents besides. Somebody someday will see what the commitments of our society really are, and will make them actual, and so illuminate much that is now doing in relative dark; he will have found what survives and what has been added and what the resultant new aspect is of our culture. Meanwhile there is the adventure of the intellectual proletariat.

Meanwhile there is also the literary revival in its various forms. It seems to me that James had the subject of the intellectual proletariat beautifully in hand before it existed; almost by himself he invented the artist as hero in defeat and made up the conventions by which his heroism could be expressed. That he had also the vision, and the courage to use it, of the Medusa-face of life, has little to do with the success of his revival. That, representing an older elite, he yet makes an excellent bridge between the present elite and the middlebrow, is the whole secret of what is genuine in the revival. I do not see that either Forster or Fitzgerald serve any similar purpose. Forster is up a little, as he should be, in the cycle of reputation. Fitzgerald, I expect, is a kind of backwards prophecy: as a characteristic figure of the twenties he ought to mean something—some incompleted threat, perhaps. My prejudice is sharp; as I can see little ever alive in his work, I see only his figure to revive.

If these remarks carry any weight at all, it ought to seem the natural sequence of things that the writing of the late forties should be less experimental in language and form than that of the twenties. The job of *what the writing is about* has become the job of experiment and form; or, let us say, form and experiment in language have become attractive at a deeper set of levels than in the twenties: those levels where the substance of the thing expressed has to be created into form. Experiment in language requires more of a culture safely assumed than we seem to possess; and, on the contrary, when a writer is responsible for much more of the substance of his culture than the profession is accustomed to, he will tend to submit as much as possible to the controlling aspect of executive form. I imagine this has something to do with the formal influence of Henry James—quite apart from his revival. Certainly, also, it has something to do with the renewed sense of prosody and the re-assertion of the magical-architectural values of metre. The shift in emphasis is not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at all because experimentation came to a dead end, and it will be a great pity if in the effort to make a poetry of statement, reaction should lead writers to make statement without poetry—which seems to me to have happened already in some painting and some music. It is not unlikely we might have an intensifying warfare in the arts where on one side you got insistence on unmediated perception and on the other insistence on the absolute matrix of form. This would result if, freed from both tradition and purpose, the impulse to experiment came to a dead end. But this could only come about if—to remember an earlier PR symposium—there were a real failure of nerve: a loss of the real delight in imaginative risk.

What is ominous about the agglutination of writers in the universities is just that it declares such a possibility, especially if you look at it from the point of view of the old free-lancing risk those of my age grew up with as natural. But I do not know that the mortality of talent need be any higher in the universities than in other possible situations; it is merely that different precautions—different measures in public literary health—need to be taken now from those needful at an earlier time. Principally, these are measures of resolution that the leisure that exists for scholarly work shall also exist for literary work, and that the temptation to do more teaching—to make more money—and the other temptation, to lead more than two kinds of social life, both be resisted. This is a matter for the individuals concerned; some will fail all round, some will become wholly teachers, some will succeed. In any case, the writers will be in the universities. The economic, political, and cultural drifts of our society are towards the institutionalization of all the professions; their special freedoms will lie *only* in their own work, which to those with the American experience seems too little. As a people we are unused to taking our risks in our work. But even if society did not push writers into the universities, the enormous absolute and relative growth in the number of writers—a by-product of the geometrical progression of college graduates in the last fifty years—would do so. No form of free-lancing in the old sense could take care of them; and what room there is will naturally be taken up by the less serious writers, who make better free-lancers. It is also of course true that with the growth of the academies there has been an increase in the number of academic writers moving into serious fields.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here we come hard on the sixth question; the remarks above in their various ways all marshall themselves about it. The "new criticism" naturally concentrated upon the analysis and interpretation of poetry because the language of the poetry itself was, like the elite who wrote it, self-elected; because its character was highly experimental in language and form; and because, so to speak, its authors were internal free-lancers—without adequate relation to the society of which they expressed the substance more and more as an *aesthetic* experience. (I duck the relation of this to poetry's "ever-diminishing audience," because I am not sure we have not merely returned, for the kind of court poetry we write, to the audience which preceded the era of universal education, and I suspect that audience is larger, not smaller, than it used to be. We have not been *able* to turn up any poetry to go with the new situation; it is either a failure or—more likely—a difference in our cultural structure.) It would seem to me that, just as the practice of writers now forces them to experiment with the very substance of their work, so criticism ought to analyze and elucidate, ought somehow to get at and bring to judgment of maximum knowledge, what is going on in these deep experiments at bringing the substance of culture to aesthetic expression. To the degree that critics become conscious of the job, they will transpose their skills to such a purpose. Re-examination is a perpetual need, since what is examined turns always a new face.

It is only one aspect of that face—and by no means surely the Medusa face—that shows through the tension between Soviet communism and ourselves. So far as we make it seem more than one aspect, or make it the dominant face, we create a swindling chasm between ourselves and our common enterprise; and so far as we do that, we cannot handle the tension except by forcing it to that crisis of which the cost is "not less than everything." That extravagance is the swindle, and it seems to me we tend to that extravagance because we do not understand our own culture very well, and do not know to what it is we are committed. To find out is partly our job.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Gorham Davis:

The Versailles treaty of 1919, the stock-market collapse of 1929, and the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement of 1939, marked off historical decades for us in America so neatly, and those decades seemed to have such distinctive literary character, that we have been unduly disappointed in the apparently indeterminate character of the literary forties. Here it is 1948, and the decade has not yet declared itself! Actually I think it has had a consistent character. But there are explainable reasons, besides the fact that the war lasted until 1945, why this character has not been expressed in as many fresh imaginative works, in as many substantial poems, novels and plays, as were the characters of the twenties and thirties.

Of course, the total literary production of any period defies simple and exhaustive definition. In giving names to periods, we are really thinking of certain ideas which a number of writers consciously shared, and which in retrospect seem most significant, historically. Granted this sense of a period, clearly a number of writers of the twenties were rediscovering America with the help of the great continental realists, and in a spirit which was anti-Puritan, anti-philistine, anti-provincial. And clearly in the thirties that spirit was transformed by the depression, the New Deal and the opposition to fascism, into a positive social-literary program. Though most of the writers, at different points in the decade, broke rather quickly with directly Communist affiliations, they caught an organic, dynamic, historical sense of literature in society and of the poet as hero, that went back through Marx to the Romantic theorists, especially in Germany, to Herder, Fichte, Hegel and the rediscoverers of Vico.

It is in terms of the sharply different theories of art and society now influential in the United States that we can best understand many features of the present literary situation, including the weakness of our fiction. If the imaginative writing of the forties is less ambitious and interesting than that of the twenties and thirties, it is partly because of the inhibiting effect of current aesthetic and academic theory. No theories can determine or even foretell what new genius is likely to appear, what Swift or Blake or Poe, or foretell whether

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he will go with or against his time, or what works of the past he will draw his inspiration from. But we do know that if certain theories of art are generally taught young writers, and taught with conviction and effect, this teaching is bound to have at least a limiting or negative influence on much of the work produced until these theories change, or are made to change in the course of theoretical controversy rising out of the historical situation.

In this sense a distinct trend can be defined in the forties in the attitude toward literature taught in the colleges. This is important, because after this war, under the G.I. Bill of Rights, such a large proportion of the potential writers who had been through the war-experience went back into the colleges and into the crowded literature and writing courses taught by the younger, more fashionable teachers. Even before the war the colleges had pretty well come to dominate the world of serious letters in this country. Most of the young writers teach in the colleges and publish their work in the college quarterlies, which are so numerous now that no one can possibly read them all. But they are filled mostly with criticism. If a writer is supporting himself as a teacher, he has to spend his time working up material for courses in forms which are most readily turned into critical articles.

In the academic atmosphere criticism seems more central, more important, than imaginative work, and is certainly more likely to give professional prestige and lead to better offers. Creative work in these circumstances is usually guarded, limited, self-consciously subtle, written with one's colleagues in mind. The occasional short story or lyric is marginal to the criticism, a display of literary sensibility to justify the writer's claims as a critic. Academic life is full of politics, bitter jealousies, complex relations of all kinds, yet the people inside this world have never written good novels about it. It seems less fruitful for the imaginative writer as material than even the vicissitudes of bohemianism.

Nor do these young writers who would have been the bohemians, the avant-gardists, the radicals and little magaziners of the twenties and thirties constitute a dissident faction in the colleges, fighting against academic conservatism. With the emphasis on textual explication, on absolute values, on individual ethics and on the complete autonomy of art, the new critics and the old guard have formed a nearly solid front. The contributors to the highbrow quarterlies have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

great prestige among their colleagues, and are as welcome at meetings of the Modern Language Association as they are in the pages of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. Even regional differences no longer exist. The Southern Agrarians have gone east and west to professorships of increasing importance.

The Marxism of the thirties had little real influence on the teaching of literature in the colleges. A few Marxist studies were written, some "social backgrounds" courses were added, and American Civilization Programs became popular. But developments in the forties have more than reversed the trend. Great Books courses are almost universal, and in these the work of the past is studied out of social context and, so far as is possible, by absolute humanist and literary standards. In the freshman courses, where the Brooks and Warren textbooks or imitations of them prevail, the preoccupation is with close analysis of texts, with the imaginative relationship of elements within the work of art, and with freedom, through ambiguity and irony, from any worldly certainty except an aesthetic one. This is good immediate experience for freshmen, and it corrects the excessive biographical detail and influence-tracing of earlier teaching. But it is based on a theory of literature which rejects literature's historical, social and psychological character in a fashion quite inconsistent with the actualities of literary experience.

The academics are interested in contemporary literature as such for the ways it can be placed within the vast hierarchy of world art and for the slight changes it may make in the relationships within that hierarchy. They do not give contemporary literature superior relevance because it is formed out of ideas and actions and feelings in which we are very specially implicated at the moment as social beings. They do not acknowledge its developmental role as part of the historic process as it brings together conscious and unconscious elements, personal and social elements, in imaginatively graspable relationships which inevitably affect social attitudes and behavior. They are opposed to psychological identification with action or character, or to discussion of characters in novels and plays as if they existed as social types in history instead of considering strictly their aesthetic function in the particular work of art. These doctrines deny vital elements which have been part of the literary experience in all the great national cultures, and which, as part of the conscious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

purpose of a majority of great writers, have helped to determine their literary forms.

In the forties in the colleges Marxist and Freudian ideas have been assimilated more and more intelligently and critically in the social sciences where departmentalism is disappearing. Sociologists in their study of American character types have turned up all sorts of ideas and relationships which should be extremely interesting to novelists. But in the literature courses *sociologic* is nearly as abusive a term as *relativism, positivism* or *psychologism*. Literature can deal with ethical or religious problems, but only if these are immutable problems, independent of the time spirit or the Protestant spirit, and if their solution is a supernatural one.

The influence of T. S. Eliot was very strong all during the thirties, of course, even among academics who were liberal or communist in their political sympathies. But in the forties the principles of *After Strange Gods* have triumphed in the schools. Liberalism, progressivism and naturalism are not only dismissed as false and superficial, but they are said to make impossible literary understanding and even the maintenance of personality.

Current academic ideas are favorable to a difficult, fragmentary, highly subjective poetry in which there is little dramatic action or fable, and in which characters appear only as masks of the poet. They are favorable to the social, philosophic or even religious novel. As early as 1923 Eliot said flatly that the novel ended with Flaubert and James, and that the future belongs to myth. Critical excitement about myth rose steadily until about 1946, but no one has written myths in this country, for obvious reasons. On the other hand, the novel or epic has gone through so many changes, so many successive simplifications and complications, so many different relationships to social groups, that there is no reason to suppose it has ended. There are hundreds of ideas available for novels if only writers had the creative will to use them.

There is every reason to suppose that this creative will may appear. The academic attitudes I have described were historically conditioned. They were a very predictable result of the reaction against Marxism after the Moscow trials and the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, of the political vacuum in which the war was fought, and of the flight from history after the atom bombing and the photo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

graphs from the concentration camps. They were also influenced by the war-created prosperity, and the expansion and power of universities.

But now the political vacuum is filling in with the fight for Western Europe and for the survival of a western culture, and with the debates in this country caused by the rise of the Wallace movement. So far this has been too negative, opposing Stalinism and Taftism with humanist or socialist abstractions. But now the concept of the Third Force is taking more positive shape both in Europe and America, and acquiring concrete political will. Intellectuals and writers will be increasingly involved in this struggle, and it is bound to affect their literary ideas, their sense of both political and literary possibility, and of the relation between them. This will be something quite different from the aestheticism of the academies or the degradation of artistic dogma in Moscow. 1949 may also mark the beginning of a period.

Leslie A. Fiedler:

It becomes easier and easier to *say* these days (we have known it for a long time) that the writer in the forties is essentially concerned with establishing alternatives to naturalism. This involves the re-instatement in his vocabulary of such words as 'freedom,' 'responsibility' and 'guilt', words which a little while ago he regarded as obscenities, and which even yet he cannot manage without uneasiness. All the better—that uneasiness redeems him from the possibilities of sentimentality, from the sterile certainty of the New Humanists, whose impertinent attacks on naturalism delayed for years the legitimate revolt of creative writers. It was necessary that we be able honestly to say of Babbitt and More, "Who the hell are *they?*" before a re-assertion of the autonomy of the individual could seem anything but a slogan of the White Terror. It is a help, too, that our leading naturalists have become middle-aged, ripe for ritual slaughter.

But best of all is that fact that our revolt began, as it were, against our wills, with technical annoyance, with offended sensi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bilities—rather than with a program. It was, for instance, the relentless blur of Farrell's style, the failure of his ponderous honesty; Steinbeck's shameless extortion of sentiment; the shapelessness of the Proletarian Novel, that moved us, protesting, toward the central recognition that failures of style and feeling were signs of the inadequacy of a tyrannical subject-matter, a systematic reduction of meaning, a 'scientific' equation of the individual with the sum of his environmental causes. It was good for us *as artists* that our discovery of the need to re-establish focuses of moral responsibility, to be done with the featureless passive sufferer as hero was a function of our desire to write a good sentence and our resolve not to exploit indeterminate feeling. There is for the non-writer, I suppose, something trivial, even offensive in such a point of view, but the writer is convinced of the ultimate humanity, the essential morality, the *necessity* of the practice of his art, and he is tempted to trust his metaphors, his meters more than himself. There is, after all, on his shelf that monument to an opposite approach, *momento mori* and souvenir of his beginnings in one, *Proletarian Literature in the United States.*

Our generation is haunted by the memory of the profane mystique which created that drab memorial; when we were kids becoming a writer seemed, if not synonymous with, at least an aspect of becoming a Communist; abandoning oneself to the proletariat and finding oneself as an artist seemed a single act—and there was a covert moral satisfaction (we did not have those words then, of course) in what was at once a self-sacrifice and a self-assertion. Our awakening was gradual, though a little faster than our political disenchantment, toward a realization of the enormous *contempt* for art just below the culture-vulturish surface of the John Reed Clubs. In such a critic as Edmund Wilson, the old heresy still persists, that art is a solace of exploitation-ridden societies, a second-best expedient that will disappear with Socialism; and scarcely one of us with such roots is entirely free of the suspicion that in coming to terms with our craft before righting the world, we are guilty. That concept, battered and despised, nags at us a little, whispers from underground 'traitor!' because we do not spend ourselves utterly or, at least, first of all in political action; its prick is one of the many despairs of varying magnitudes we call these days 'anguish.'

'Anguish'—I have avoided the word so far precisely because

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it covers everything from a cosmic passion to the meanest wringing of the hands. The proper anguish of our generation of writers as writers is compounded chiefly of that social guilt and the uneasiness I spoke of above at having to re-invent the whole vocabulary of ethical responsibility, that stubbornly insists, despite ingenuity and patience, in resembling what our fathers spoke in churches we have foresworn: apostasy and return, it is a contradictory self-reproach that will not somehow cancel out.

The writer has preferred always a foster-father to a father (think of Stephen Dedalus and Bloom); fleshly ancestors embarrass him, but ghostly ancestors he must have even in the periods of extremest experiment, and this is, as everyone knows, not such a period. The experimentalism of the twenties as it has survived in a thin academy of revolt seems a tyranny of the Interesting as perilous as the tyranny of Subject Matter in the thirties. We have legitimized the word 'tradition,' and though our tradition is open to the point of eccentricity, we have moved from the mere evocation of ancestors towards a pious imitation even of forms. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Donne, Hopkins, Rilke, Lorca, Proust, Joyce, Eliot, Kafka, James, Dostoevsky—there is scarcely a Culture Hero in the list that first comes to mind whose vogue does not go back to the thirties, some even deep into the twenties and beyond. Only Kafka belongs particularly to us, and behind him the witty anguish of Kierkegaard, but Kafka in especial, polysemous, obsessive, fragmentary—a Jew.

His Jewishness is by no means incidental; the real Jew and the imaginary Jew between them give to the current period its special flavor. In *Ulysses,* our prophetic book of the urbanization of art, the Artist and the Jew reach for each other tentatively and fall apart; but in the Surveyor K. a unity is achieved, a mystic prototype proposed: Jewishness as a condition of the Artist. In America in particular, where the impulse of the Frontier has become the doubtful strength of cities, a generation of writers and critics whose thirtieth year falls somewhere in the forties has appeared: Delmore Schwartz, Alfred Kazin, Karl Shapiro, Isaac Rosenfeld, Paul Goodman, Saul Bellow, H. J. Kaplan, typically urban, second-generation Jews, chiefly ex-Stalinist, ambivalently intellectual, but for all their anguish insolently at home with ideas and words. Before the advantage of their long maturity, forced early in the Movement, the writer drawn to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New York from the provinces feels, in the terms Jean Stafford has so aptly exploited, the Rube, attempts to conform; and the almost parody of Jewishness achieved by the gentile writer in New York is a strange and crucial testimony of our time.

It is not surprising that Kafka pre-eminently conditions the revolt against naturalism in a generation with such a core; the obsessive, the parabolic, the irreducible become defining aims of our art. There are other elements to be sure: from Dostoevsky the underground man, the baptism in evil; from Joyce, Eliot or Mann, the exploitation of the Myth; from various Christian sources the concepts of Fall and Original Sin (though in the United States not a full-fledged Christian metaphysical school like that Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis in England have developed out of George MacDonald); from James a morality of style, from Hawthorne and Melville a symbolic audacity and complexity.

It is an unselfconsciously international complex; and indeed the Jew as writer helps mediate a traditional dilemma of the artist in America, the conflicting claims of an allegiance to Europe and to the American scene. But having left behind him the immigrant's drive drastically to deny an abandoned past, the second-generation Jewish writer has learned to be aware of a tradition immediately his, that is European and American at once; he is *himself* the guarantee of the singleness of Europe and America, and he escapes completely the polar tugs of a defensive chauvinism and an embarrassed self-abnegation before Continental culture.

In a second act of mediation, too, the Jewish writer plays a role, in the mediation between writer and intellectual. The typical American author in most periods has been almost aggressively anti-intellectual. One thinks of Twain or even of Melville, and in the generation just before ours of Hemingway and Wolfe and Faulkner, and, set against them, the melancholy academicians Spingarn and Babbitt and More. The immense impoverishment caused by that schism, the creative paralysis of the University, and the complementary weakness of ideas in our literature is scandalous; and that strange American invention, the non-academic, non-creative Intellectual, unfrocked, detached, the Comedian of Ideas, is that cleavage made flesh. The urban Jewish writer moving inward from the schools of Marxism is at least not contemptuous of ideas, and, at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

best, he is convinced of the unity of his vocation from conversation to creation.

In this mediation to be sure, the great exiles, James and Eliot, and the Southern Agrarians have preceded the writer of our generation, but our situation is perhaps closer to the center than their special cases of expatriation or regionalism.

In the recent migration of writers into the universities this unifying tendency is being sealed. The possible meanings of teachings in a college are, of course, many—and the writer may be quite simply trying to earn a living, but in most cases there is something more: an impatience with the concept of freedom in the term "free-lancer"; an attempt to close the gap between criticism and creation, to make of the teaching of literature a discipline for discriminating readers; a stratagem to mitigate the alienation of the writer by attacking middlebrow culture on its most sensitive flank. For the writer as an individual there are many compensations (though he pays a desperate price in an accommodation to routine and what has been called the 'black vacuum' of his students' minds, an accommodation which he fears always may become habitual); he finds an adequate community and the possibility of making himself a better one. For the University, it has been a redemption from historicity and scientism in the study of literature and the arts. And for literature?—it is difficult to say. The average American university is not at all, as the word is conventionally understood, 'academic'; there is, I think, little threat from that direction, but much from the appalling and profound weariness, the occasional despair that accompanies the spiritually expensive pursuit of teaching.

The writer in the Lansings, Madisons, Moscows, and Lincolns of America schools with his own hand his own audience on a periphery he could not even dream in the centers of New York or San Francisco. We are entering a period, I feel, in which successful strategic raids into middlebrow territory will be increasingly profitable. The decline of experimentalism, and the re-institution of the plot as a concomitant of new notions of freedom and responsibility make possible an extension of the serious writer's audience (Robert Penn Warren is a notable example in this country and Graham Greene in England); and there is the further factor that the production of middlebrow literature can no longer keep pace with the demands

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of its audience. The opening of the super-slicks to more serious writing, the flirtation of the *Cosmopolitan* with belle-lettres, the association of large commercial publishers with little magazines, the frantic excursions of editors up and down the countryside are not so much tokens of some radical change of heart, as of an incipient panic at a growing discrepancy between mass production methods of distribution and the low supply of popular literature; publishers and editors, abhorring a vacuum, turn in desperation, if not in love, to the more serious writer. This mild revolution will doubtless increase the pressures toward accommodation as well as opportunities for publication, and we must proportionally increase our wariness and our devotion. War, in all its senses, is the condition not the crisis of our lives; this at least we know in the late forties.

It is a dreary and tiny sector from which we as writers fight, and I suspect it is not even marked on the maps of the General Staff; but there are moments when our struggle to preserve the integrity of play on the adult level, to defend the necessity of ambiguity and irony, to assert the morality of form and to specify feeling, seems to merge with a political conflict, with a *real* (as they say) war. It is not then our duty *as writers* to deny our vocation for a gun or the O.W.I., or to impugn the autonomy of our fictions with dogmatic assertions or pledges of allegiance. A poem or a story, after all, solves the problem it poses; the war successfully subsumed in a fiction, ends with the fiction; a successful poem is a complete and final act; if it leads outward to other action, it is just so far a failure.

But the absolute claim to freedom in the creative act, in *going on writing* as we understand it, challenges many political systems and is challenged by them, most spectacularly these days by the Soviet Communist world-view. An honest devotion to writing *hypothetically* (is it a Giant or a windmill?) attacks Stalinism, tests its pretensions and our own analysis at once; what cannot endure the practice of the most human of activities is the Enemy. This is our sufficient task as writers; as men, as citizens, though we are required by no iron law to be consistent, we may choose to defend our status and our vocation against the Enemy they have defined, with what weapons come to hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clement Greenberg:

It seems to me that the most pervasive event in American letters over the last ten years is the stabilization of the avantgarde, accompanied by its growing acceptance by official and commercial culture. It has modified that culture to a limited extent and has in return been granted a recognition and place that do not dissatisfy it. The avantgarde has been professionalized, so to speak, organized into a field for careers; it is no longer the adventure beyond ratified norms, the refusal in the name of truth and excellence to abide by the categories of worldly success and failure. The avantgarde writer *gets ahead* now, and inside established channels: he obtains university or publishing or magazine jobs, finds it relatively easy to be published himself, is asked to lecture, participate in round tables, etc., writes introductions to the classics, and can even win the status of a public figure.

There is nothing inherently wrong in all this (after all, who is best fitted to write introductions to the classics? and why shouldn't serious writers be rewarded with material security?), but so far this accommodation has produced liabilities that outweigh the assets. Whether these liabilities are inevitably connected with social accommodation here and now, I cannot say. The relation of cause and effect is very involved. But it is a fact that there has been a certain regimentation of the avantgarde, a standardization of its attitudes, which—whether the attitude be Henry Miller's or John Crowe Ransom's—threatens to impose a new academicism on us.

Academic because predictable. It has become possible lately to pigeon-hole and predict almost everybody. There is the literary quarterly critic with his "method"; there is the fulltime poet; there is the all-around "creative man" or aesthete (interested in the movies, painting, poetry, old almanacs, architecture, etc.); there is the ex- or disabused Marxist (in which category I put myself); there is the "orgast"; there is the neo-saint (socialist, anarchist or otherwise) with his moral exhibitionism; there is the Hemingway or Western "intellectual"; there is the Kafkan pseudo-philosopher and pseudo-poet; there is the survivor of the Left Bank; there is the man who listens

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the latest word from Paris—and so on. Each classification has its sages, managers, and impresarios. Naturally, the lines of separation are not sharply drawn (without simplifying the situation it would be impossible to describe it) and there is considerable overlapping. Yet everybody knows more or less where he belongs, and lines himself up and acts accordingly. What matters is where you wish to place yourself in the struggle for reputation, not what you burn to say.

The avantgarde has been allowed to freeze itself into such a standardized repertory of attitudes because of the absence of new challenges to itself within the field of experience. On the one side it is faced with political crisis, on the other with the increasing aggressiveness and the expansion of middlebrow culture. Both together work to stop the progress of bourgeois culture as a whole toward new experience—one by making its vanguard timid, and the other by forcing it to wait upon backwardness and cultural demagoguery.

Literary rediscovery has always been a part of avantgarde activity, which insists traditionally on making revaluation a constant and permanent process. That revivals now figure so prominently in publishing only shows the extent to which avantgarde practices have been taken over by official culture. One could say that revivals really began when Stendhal predicted his own discovery (not rediscovery). But didn't Dryden rediscover Chaucer? I feel, however, that the modern precedent was set by the Germans when they rediscovered Hölderlin and Kleist around the turn of the century.

It would appear true that the poetry of the past has a diminishing audience; Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth do not seem to be read by anywhere near as large a proportion of the cultivated public as they used to be. But the popularity of contemporary poetry increases steadily and increases phenomenally, and the successful poet still dominates the literary and academic scene, even if he is not read by as many people as the novelist is. It strikes me as risky to say that poetry has had "an ever diminishing audience" in recent years.

The criticism that concentrates itself on the close analysis of poetry is by and large an American phenomenon and a concomitant, among other things, of the store we set by techniques and of our concern with the statement of procedures. This criticism has illuminated much but it has also darkened much, shutting out both air and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light. The detailed analysis of works of art is as much needed as anything in the field of criticism, but we distrust the tendency to make it the only permissible kind of criticism—as we also distrust critics who seem so incapable of independent and fresh insights into the ways in which their subject matter is related to the rest of human activity. Here we feel the breath of provincialism, not to say academicism.

Of course literature would benefit from an equally close examination of prose fiction. But the latter presents much greater difficulties to the analysis of form. The poem can be viewed—and only too often is—as a congeries of details that the critic can attack seriatim, but even the most obtuse of the "new" critics would hesitate to analyze a novel that way. Especially since we have not yet even established satisfactorily what form is in fiction. (Form being just as indispensable to the success of the novel as it is to that of other kinds of art, how then do the novels of such supposedly clumsy writers as Balzac, Dickens or Dostoyevsky solve the problem of form—for, given their success in the reading, we must grant that they do solve that problem?) What, I believe, has made the answer to this question so difficult is the fact that we are still subject, like Flaubert and James, to the illusion that the precepts Aristotle derived for the drama from Aeschylus and Sophocles, and which are exemplified in French classical dramaturgy, govern all literary forms. But economy and unity of action in the narrative are something other than what they are in the drama. It must have been the unconscious realization of this difference —and the inability at the same time to determine exactly what it was—that led Proust and Joyce to borrow, as if in desperation, so many of their "structural" principles from music. And even then they did not escape from drama, for what they borrowed from most was the Wagnerian opera, that *Gesamtkunstwerk,* that work of "total art."

As a person the writer ought indeed to involve himself in the struggle against Stalinism to the "point of commitment." Why should we ask less of him than of any other adult interested in the survival of the common decencies and authentic culture? However, he is under no moral—or aesthetic—obligation whatsoever to involve himself in this struggle as a writer. That he is interested in the struggle as a person does not mean that he is necessarily interested in it *qua* writer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Qua writer he is only interested necessarily in what he can write about successfully. I do not mean, however, that the writer does not invest his whole personality in his writing. What I do mean is that his whole personality may not be invested in his interest in the struggle against Stalinism, or, for that matter, in any sort of politics.

It must be obvious to anyone that the volume and social weight of middlebrow culture, borne along as it has been by the great recent increase of the American middle class, have multiplied at least tenfold in the past three decades. This culture presents a more serious threat to the genuine article than the old-time pulp, dime-novel, Tin Pan Alley, *Schund* variety ever has or will. Unlike the latter, which has its social limits clearly marked out for it, middlebrow culture attacks distinctions as such and insinuates itself everywhere, devaluating the precious, infecting the healthy, corrupting the honest, and stultifying the wise. Insidiousness is of its essence, and in recent years its avenues of penetration have become infinitely more difficult to detect and block. In this matter it is necessary for each of us to suspect, and correct, himself. For we are all of us becoming guilty in one way or another. We wouldn't dream of being Edgar Rice Burroughs but any one of us could all too easily become the equivalent of John Marquand or William Saroyan. Respectable people here and abroad have taken both the latter for important American writers, a mistake not made so far in the case of Burroughs. (The situation is no better in painting and music.)

John Crowe Ransom:

A critic addresses himself to these big questions with some embarrassment; it feels portentous, and he feels self-conscious. He would find it easier to examine the individual artists than to lay down reports and strategies for literature in general.

What is the condition of a great artistic creativity? I believe it is a kind of exuberance of animal spirits which is just the opposite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a sense of frustration, or if you prefer a kind of massive joy which expresses itself for the human animal in spontaneous sensibility and love. And certainly that condition is not conspicuously fulfilled by our present writers. The fictions, the poetries, are in great volume, but psychically they are too constricted. They come out of tension, moral protest, sheer animal mal-adaptation, which drives one quickly into affairs, but scarcely into perfect art, for it precludes the free sensibility. One is tempted to say of the creative effort of our decade: It is largely abortive. But immediately one would have to add that a high grade of literary intelligence, all the same, is widespread today perhaps as never before. A great deal of hard study is going on, and perhaps a record volume of aesthetic theorizing by amateurs. It is a period of Reviews, of Little Magazines, of very serious critical books, which achieve publication on an unprecedented scale because for once there are readers enough to want them.

And as one of the Editors' questions would suggest, it is a period of revivals too—but should we not say "consequently"? The list of authors whose revival is mentioned is most significant: James, Forster, Fitzgerald. We are willing to go back and use again a kind of literature which our own writers furnish insufficiently. The market seems to be perennial. Evidently we need a literature which is complete, and that which is being produced is incomplete.

Is it possible to figure where the present writers are defective? Not in a few words, of course. But I would make an association between the state of the creative arts and a curious turn that has appeared in aesthetic theory. Aesthetics used to be the study of beauty; in Kant's epochal work, the foundation of systematic aesthetics, everything depended on the "judgment of taste," affirming beauty. But it has become common to define aesthetics as the study of art, and in many able aesthetic writings beauty has dropped clear out of the reckoning. Explanations have been offered for this shift, but I wonder if the simplest explanation might not be the best. Aesthetic studies want to focus upon actual data; and like other speculative branches they want to have a contemporary significance; but the modern arts increasingly do not pretend, nor even wish, to achieve beauty; so the aestheticians study art.

It is said that the modern world, comparatively speaking, is not one to evoke from artists the sense of beauty, and I should have no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

idea of controverting that, though "the world" is a very big affair. Perhaps beauty is waiting for better cultures, better times. Does it seem in our habitual rage that beauty is the merest tidbit of positive value, a queer satisfaction that must be rated in the class of luxuries and is not very nutritive, therefore unsuited to these times and not much missed anyhow?

The current "existentialism" is an importation from France, but we know that in part its data were the impressions taken from a lot of recent American writings that had been translated into the French. The doctrine should be at home when it comes back to us here. To put it much too briefly, our literature is "existentialist" in the sense that existing environment seems to the American artist too harsh for the response of gentleness and beauty. Would not the artist be a simpleton if he made the response anyway? But the fact is that he could not. Environment is both nature and society; and where the social adjustments are oppressive they affect our attitude even to nature, and produce a general nausea and/or violence. On the contrary the sense of beauty, translated into naturalistic terms, is some sort of creature satisfaction in the achieved way of living, an "all's well" pronounced in the flush of successful adaptation to environment; it leads the creature into the strangest behaviors, so that he embraces this environment, is "in love" with nature and society, rushes into the "sweet excess" of sensibility, and even commits himself to an "acceptance" that is almost sacramental or religious in the degree of its confidence. Clearly an age of animal anxiety is no time for an experience which puts the last stamp of approval upon a given healthy adaptation. But our artists have not an affection but a disaffection to celebrate. As for the forms of their art, they find plenty of occasion for ironic and satirical effects, and for a *saeva indignatio* which is sometimes frontal and rhetorical though preferably disguised under the false gaiety of sophistication. Distinctly, these are literary strategies of rejection, of attack, and there are no better strategies for the purpose. Poets share in them with fictionists. I can testify that many young writers whose manuscripts pass over an editor's desk, in verse as well as fiction, are full subscribers to the mode, by reason of their unconscious time-sense if not by benefit of instruction. Their career is initiated in an age that is brilliant in the hateful or halfway arts and almost unacquainted with the full effect.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I would honor fully the incomplete artists who must attack. The obligation seems to them prior to any suggestion of beauty, and at any rate their immediate and unquestionable obligation. A rather wretched poem was once the source of a little compendium of wisdom when it represented the poetic temperament as given to "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love." The occasion which calls for the hate or the scorn is not the occasion which calls for the love though it would appear that the artist is improving the occasion. The poet must bear arms; the poet in politics. In a recent review of the poetry of Bertolt Brecht, Miss Hannah Arendt indicated this poet's conviction that the arts of peace were not for him, a European who wherever he might be must share the sufferings of his own people. The warmest public approval must go out to that position. Then we are told by other writers—probably they are editorial aestheticians, whose offices are in New York City where they look out of the windows eastward upon the Atlantic—that the same position holds good for the American artists too, who must deny themselves the advantages of their own actual situation as long as the noise of lamentation is loud on the earth. For my part I should honor the American artists who govern themselves accordingly. Theirs is an intense moral sensitivity which, again, the constitution of the psyche being what it is, must claim priority over the free or aesthetic sensitivity.

But I think we must honor also those American writers who as a matter of course fulfill themselves and proceed to some positive and formally complete art. We have them, and though they are generally little ones they sometimes are distinguished. Probably they live in the "regions," the parts of the vast continental area of these United States (like the politically "backward" South), where a normal and successful life goes on after the local fashion, and there is no compulsive consciousness that these times are only an interim, in which one enlists in some revolution in order that happiness may be possible again. They would scarcely be the natives and residents of New York City where life is lived grimly, at least by the literary colony, in the sight of ruined Europe. These artists may be considered, as they would consider themselves, to be in their duty too. Otherwise I am puzzled about the populations of the vast continental area where a normal life goes on, etc. A great many people are there, and evi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dently they mean to work out a stable living and to have an art for the complement and affirmation of the life. Who is going to reject them? Theirs will be the artists, if we are to have any at all, who will take the places left empty by James, Forster, and Fitzgerald, and make the revivals less peremptory.

It will occur to some readers that I should have to regard the art of fiction very much along the lines formulated by the tough Spanish thinker Ortega, whose remarks are just this moment Englished in the book, *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel* (Princeton University Press). I mention this text with the more satisfaction because Ortega is powerfully motivated against any cultural product which is "middlebrow"—though I think he might squirm under the locution. In America there have long been hostilities between such organs of critical opinion as the *Partisan Review* and a great tribe of more popular writers including Van Wyck Brooks, H. M. Jones, Donald Adams, and Bernard De Voto. These writers are certainly in support of a "middlebrow" literature, but theirs is an ambiguous position which we might very well break down into two separate positions before we oppose them without reservation. They want a literature which is in affirmation rather than attack, and they are temperamentally not inclined to suppose that the human creature's biological destiny lies in the revolutionary attitude. In this respect they have made a good fight for the second category of artists which I have indicated above. But they have another position which is not so good. They are contented with a literature which is "middlebrow" in the sense that it is commonplace and technically undistinguished. It is clear they do no good to young artists who need instruction more than they need praise. Perhaps there are not enough critics of great technical competence who can dissociate technical artistic achievement from existentialism and politics. But in conclusion I find a modest comfort in my impression that, on this second ground, the *Sewanee* and *Kenyon Reviews* are as much opposed to the "middlebrow" critics as is the *Partisan*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wallace Stevens:

These answers are limited to parts of questions 4, 6 and 7 and to poetry.

Experiment in language. Poetry is nothing if it is not experiment in language. A recent remark by de Rougemont,

> "Le vrai superstitieux se moque des superstitions comme le vrai poète des sujets et des mots poétiques,"

explains this. The poet records his experience as poet in subjects and words which are part of that experience. He knows that nothing but the truth of that experience means anything to him or to anyone else. Experiment in respect to subjects and words is the effort on his part to record the truth of that experience.

In this statement the experience is central and experiment is the struggle with the experience and here experiment, also, is central. But often there is little, even no, experience and here experiment is merely experiment. The opinion that, unlike the twenties, this is not a period of experiment seems to be right in respect to experience in both senses. In respect to central experiment, the experience of the poet as poet may be too much or too little for him to record as yet: too much and too immediate or too little and not near enough; and so it may never be recorded at all. In respect to experiment that is merely experiment, this seems, in the circumstances, to be a pastime proper for Nero's children's children.

If these things are fluctuations of literary modes, what is the cause of the fluctuations? It may be simply our experience of life. To sum this up, central experiment is one of the constants of the spirit which is inherent in a true record of experience. But experiment for the sake of experiment has no such significance. Our present experience of life is too violent to be congenial to experiment in either sense. There is also the consideration that the present time succeeds a time of experiment. Theoretically a period of attempts at a world revolution should destroy or endanger all stationary poetic subjects and words and be favorable in the highest degree to the recording of fresh experience. But the vivification of reality has not yet occurred in spite of the excitement. Only the excitement has occurred.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Experiment in form. So, too, experiment in form is one of the constants of the spirit. Much of what has been said about subjects and words applies to form. There is, however, a usage with respect to form as if form in poetry was a derivative of plastic shape. The tendency to visualize form is illustrated by the way a reference to form becomes a reference to the appearance of the poem on the page as in the case of a poem in the shape of a pear, say, or a poem without any shape at all. Such trivialities show that the record of a man's experience in the modern world is not a derivative of plastic shape. Modern poetry is not a privilege of heteroclites. Poetic form in its proper sense is a question of what appears within the poem itself. It seems worth while to isolate this because it is always form in its inimical senses that destroys poetry. By inimical senses one means the trivialities. By appearance within the poem itself one means the things created and existing there. The trivialities matter little today and most people concede that poetic form is not a question of literary mode.

About poetry. It is not necessary to answer the last question relating to the fate of culture in order to consider the present position of poetry. That question implies that an understanding of the basic meaning of literary effort involves the fate of culture. Certainly a critical concern with poetry involves an understanding of the basic meaning of literary effort. Perhaps the present interest in the analysis and interpretation of poetry is in itself an attempt to get at the basic meaning of literary effort.

It seems that poetic order is potentially as significant as philosophic order. Accordingly, it is natural to project the idea of a theory of poetry that would be pretty much the same thing as a theory of the world based on a coordination of the poetic aspects of the world. Such an idea completely changes the significance of poetry. It does what poetry itself does, that is to say, it leads to a fresh conception of the world. The sense of this latent significance exists. Many sensitive readers of poetry, without being mystics or romantics or metaphysicians, feel that there probably is available in reality something accessible through a theory of poetry which would make a profound difference in our sense of the world. The interest in the analysis and interpretation of poetry is the same thing as an interest in poetry itself. For that reason it is not possible to speak of an enlarged audience for the analysis and interpretation of poetry and at the same time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a diminishing audience for poetry itself. The analysis and interpretation of poetry are perceptions of poetry.

You may not regard these answers as responsive to questions that contemplate literary tendencies, literary atmosphere, literary interest, literary criticism, and so on. One's interest is, however, an interest in life and in reality. From this point of view it is easy to say that the basic meaning of literary effort, and, therefore, of poetry, is with reference to life and reality and not with reference to politics. The basic meaning of the effort of any man to record his experience as poet is to produce poetry, not politics. The poet must stand or fall by poetry. In the conflict between the poet and the politician the chief honor the poet can hope for is that of remaining himself. Life and reality, on the one hand, and politics, on the other, notwithstanding the activity of politics, are not interchangeable terms. They are not the same thing, whatever the Russians may pretend.

Lionel Trilling:

If I am to answer your questions at all, I had bettter begin by reporting my resistance to them: I have been reading them over and over during several days and my mind seems to refuse to take hold of them. This isn't a reflection on their sensibleness, and at one time or another I have surely raised the same questions myself and tried to answer them in conversation or in teaching or in writing. But when I come to answer them formally, and in a body, and to the end of making a coherent comment on the state of American literature in this particular year or decade, my mind jibs.

This, I suppose, is because I am not comfortable about the idea of literature as an institution, which is what your questions somehow suggest it is. I feel easy enough with the idea of literature as a trade, and as a necessity, and as an instrument. And of course I recognize that it is intellectually quite legitimate to consider literature as an institution, yet I find that whenever I have to consider it in this way my curiosity wilts and my spirits sink—for me the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

classic situation of claustrophobia has become the literary "conference" in which quite sensible people discuss the condition of literature and the social function of the writer.

I like and respect literature as a trade and wish it could nowadays be a trade more often and more easily. I believe that it is a great help to certain kinds of writers to work in relation to a paying audience, even though a small one. To please and to tempt, to stay in touch with established conventions in order to use, circumvent and transmute them—this has the effect of keeping the artist's will under pressure, of hiding some part of his intention even from himself, thus permitting him to strike deeper both into his own unconscious and into that of his audience. I don't believe that the ideal situation of the artist is the freedom to work *only* in relation to his own will and intention.

And then I can understand literature as a necessity, which I take it to have been with such writers as Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Kafka, a continuous demonstrative act, the full summation of their lives. These aren't my favorite writers but I think I know what they are up to—and what they are up to doesn't allow them to take "conditions" into account. And I can understand literature as an instrument, the way it was thought of by Blake and Lawrence, who consciously undertook to change the consciousness of society and for whom society's resistance to what they were saying was the given and accepted circumstance of their work.

These categories are not, of course, exclusive of each other. And they have one thing in common, which is the open *demand* of the writer—for money, or for attention to his internal world, or for a change in the external world. They have nothing to do with the idea of the writer which establishes itself whenever literature is discussed as an institution: that is, the idea of the writer as ideally a kind of highly privileged priest who is subsidized by a corrupt society to do it some good. On such occasions the self-pity that suffuses every statement, the hidden desire to become a civil servant, an undersecretary in charge of spiritual hygiene, suggest an essential lack of realism about the present social situation and, indeed, about any possible social situation.

Nothing I have said is meant as derogation of the guild spirit among writers, which at the present time is probably inadequate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To take account of the conditions of literature in the way of shop-talk and with the expectable bitterness and malice—that seems quite right. But I think it is useless and even harmful to spend time in formulating a clear and distinct idea of the literary weather—either you're embarked or you're not embarked. If you are embarked, the weather report can only tell you you're a fool. But what good does that information do you? And would you be any better off on shore? In modern times what we respond to in a writer is not literary power alone but literary power in conjunction with the ability to overcome and outwit the worldly situation. It's perfectly possible, as you suggest in the course of your questions, that things may come to such a pass that the writer will not be able ever to win. But he isn't helped to do what still remains to him to do by thinking about the deplorable conditions of his work. If he is to vanish, it is appropriate that he vanish in maledictions rather than in a self-commiserative sociological analysis of the discrepancy between his function and his fate.

With this said, I feel rather more able to go on to answer some of your questions. I'll begin with Question 2, under which, I think, Question 1 is subsumed.

2. We will only deceive ourselves if we continue to talk about contemporary culture in terms of highbrow and middlebrow. These detestable words suggest a cultural situation in which a small group deals with ideas and artifacts whose integrity is bound up with their difficulty, while another and much larger group deals with the dilution of these ideas and the facile simulacra of these artifacts. In such a situation we see the operation of intellect-prestige and sensibility-prestige, which are quite consonant with the other prestige notions of our civilization, the belief that there is an absolute, high-priced cultural best which can be acquired in cheap imitation. The result of this is the diminution of the common fund of middling responses to life, the depletion of the general stock of ordinary good sense and direct feeling. It may thus be said that the idea of highbrow culture as held by the middlebrow abets commercialized culture in its corrupting influence.

But this is only a residual situation, not the developing one. To understand the developing situation we must see that, while of course there still are partisans of a high and exigent culture, the mass of educated people—of intellectuals indeed—are becoming increas-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ingly suspicious of culture and even hostile toward it. They don't know this and certainly they wouldn't admit it, for culture still has honorific meanings for the middle-class. Yet the fact is that in their hearts they more and more reject the traditional methods of art, the methods of imagination, of symbol and fantasy.

This is true of the members of my own generation, who, it seems to me, grow increasingly indifferent and even antagonistic to the cultural monuments and heroes and qualities that the literary reviews celebrate as a matter of course. It is also true of the young of about the same intellectual standing. I recently gave a course in certain modern classics to some fifty undergraduates, most of whom were to enter the practical professions. They were remarkably intelligent young men, and, what is more, remarkably warm-hearted and decent. They worked with good will and enjoyment, and they were more than tolerant of my own commitments and enthusiasms; but as for themselves they were profoundly suspicious of Blake and Melville and Henry James, of Proust and Joyce and Yeats, of William James and Freud. They found these men—I noted down the adjectives—too indefinite, too aristocratic, too paradoxical, too remote from reality, not sufficiently understanding and sympathetic.

It must be observed that the rejection of the *method* of art extends to the *qualities* of art when these appear, as they do, in abstract or practical thought. Hence the suspicion of William James and Freud, which exists, in the degree that these men show in their work the qualities of art—in the degree that they are creative and spirited, and not *literal.*

It is no doubt very easy to say that what I have been describing is simply Philistinism. And it is the easier because certain Philistines have undertaken to speak for this cultural group and to attack highbrow culture as pretentious or irresponsible or corrupt or insane. It is also possible to call it Stalinism, for Stalinism becomes endemic in the American middle class as soon as that class begins to think; it is a cultural Stalinism, independent of any political belief: the cultural ideas of the ADA will not, I venture to say, be found materially different from those of the PAC; Parrington is the essential arbiter of the literary views of our more-or-less intellectual middle class, Parrington who so well plows the ground for the negation of literature.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet I think it won't do to dismiss this group and its attitudes with epithets, however just they be. I even find that I can't be wholly or merely hostile to the culture I describe, although I fear it—one can't be only hostile if one knows the people who make it up and gets the sense of their seriousness and the legitimacy of many of their aspirations. In addition, I am forced to admit that it isn't my ideal of a really good culture that the mass of intelligent people should devote a large part of their lives to dealing with difficult ideas and artifacts, and to come to believe that such an activity is—as Matthew Arnold said of someone's notion of the place of Biblical exegesis in the life of man—as much a natural function as to eat and copulate.

I believe that the group I describe is paying less and less lip-service to contemporary highbrow culture, that it has little regard for any anterior culture, that it is contriving a culture which will not be middlebrow at all in the sense of having reference, at one remove, to highbrow culture: it will be an inadequate culture and a *stupid* one, but it will be, at least for a time, satisfying in its inadequacy and dullness to the people who want it; it will contrive its own prestige and make the high and exigent culture more irrelevant than it is now. If we can think of highbrow culture as a unitary thing, it is very doubtful that its response to the cultural group I have described is a useful one. Its error lies not in its lack of "responsibility," which is a word that masks the demand for its emasculation, but in its lack of an aggressive impulse of survival. Some of my other answers may suggest what I mean.

3. The revivals you mention don't need a great deal of explanation. They aren't quantitatively very great. Yet they truly express a need, even though the need of a small number. The need is for mind to be applied to human life in its social and personal factuality and with the particular joy and goodwill of creativeness. People of almost all cultural groups are agreed that we are living in an extreme, even in an ultimate, situation; and very likely they are right. They are agreed too that the best way for literature to deal with this situation is to confront the reader with it, and as directly and literally as possible; and they may be right in their strategy. But I am inclined to think that they are promoting the paralysis of fear and hopelessness. Opposed to this is a residual feeling that one of the ways of preserving oneself is to take a serious delight in the qualities that presumably

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

justify preservation; the revivals you speak of contribute to this serious delight.

4. Nowadays we are inclined to equate experiment in literature with the complicated apparatus of scientific experiment, or of quasi-scientific experiment such as is done with rats and mazes: for us the preeminently experimental is the contrivance of mechanical devices of form. These may succeed in themselves, but in literature—the other arts may be different—they are seldom usefully communicated; it is hard for the continuator of a device or a method not to become a mere imitator—I can't see that Joyce's inventions have been used to any very good effect and I can think of many examples in which their use has crushed and obscured the writer's real quality. And our preoccupation with this kind of experiment has made us less sensitive to the less spectacular experiment that goes on whenever a writer of any originality is at work, the innovations in *style* without which nothing of value is done. There is in English what might be called a permanent experiment, which is the effort to get the language of poetry back to a certain hard, immediate actuality, what we are likely to think of as the tone of good common speech. One sees this in Skelton, in Chaucer, in the later Shakespeare, in Donne, etc. It was what Pound was after in his early days; it is what Yeats was after and what he achieved. Dante's middle style—the simplicity of speech of women at the market—and Stendhal's prose formed on the Code Napoleon, were analogous experiments. I like to think that our cultural schism may come to be bridged with the aid of a literature which will develop the experiment of a highly charged plain speech.

5. If American literature has grown more academic since the twenties it isn't because of the entrance of the writer into the university. One branch of writing has grown academic, in a neutral sense of reward, but at the behest of the literature of the twenties, which required and got a highly informed criticism. It seems to me that the university is a perfectly appropriate base of operations for the critic, though less so for the poet and even less for the novelist. Its disadvantage for the latter two does not lie in any antagonism that exists between the intellectual life and the creative life but rather in the antagonism between the pedagogical life (good enough in itself) and both the intellectual and the creative life. Yet with no desire to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defend the university, and granting that it easily gives shelter to many minds that are, in the pejorative sense, academic in the extreme, my sense of intellectual society outside the university is that it is quite as timid and stodgy as it supposes declared academics to be, that its attitudes are just as fixed and horrified and inelastic, although possibly its manners are a little easier.

6 and 7. For me these questions have an integral relation with each other. The tension between Soviet Communism and the democratic countries can be understood as, among other things, an expression of a tension which exists in our culture between two radically opposed views of man. The newspapers and the State Department will of course pervert the nature of this tension by means of all the gross clichés of current democratism, but we must not let this limit and confuse our understanding of the reality of the opposition between a simple and negative materialism and some other more complex and more possibility-creating view which I won't undertake to give a name to. I understand the great cultural work of the present period to be the development and establishment of this latter view. It is impossible for a writer with any pretensions to seriousness not to be involved in it. I understand the critical movement you refer to as being one of the manifestations of resistance to the simple and negative materialism which is endemic in modern materialism. Its significance to me lies beyond any mere increase of understanding of particular literary texts; and the intensity of its effort at a time when there is, as you say, an ever diminishing audience for poetry is a paradigm of the cultural situation as it now exists, for I take the intensity of its analysis and interpretation to represent its estimate, in the face of massive resistance, of the complication, manifoldness and possibility of the mind in the universe.

When I choose it as an example of resistance to the malign materialism pervasive through the world and established in Soviet Russia, I don't mean to inflate the importance of this critical movement, and perhaps it will be clear that I don't in fact do so, when I say that as an element of resistance it has not nearly done its work. It has not made its way among the groups that might be expected to feel its influence. After nearly twenty years of activity, it is still the *new* criticism. The notion prevails that it is abstruse and special, but this is not so; it has simply preferred to act a little haughty, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little shy, a little sullen, and even now, when it has won its way at least in academic circles, quite scaring the old-line scholars into apologetic self-consciousness, it makes out that it is still misunderstood. It has mistaken method for ideology, and pretends that all it offers is method. It should long ago have realized and admitted its ideology and carried its ark into battle. That it did not do so was an act of provincialism—or is this what you mean by academicism? Whatever name you give it, this is the fault of serious culture in general; it isn't serious enough, it doesn't properly estimate the seriousness of the situation, for it is only a frivolity to say that the situation is hopeless.

H. L. Mencken:

(In reply to the questionnaire, Mr. Mencken sent us a brief letter from which we take the liberty of reprinting the following excerpt, for its intrinsic interest.)

Sirs:

Unhappily, I have done so little current reading of late that I can't answer most of your questions. The samples I have tested convince me that the brethren and sistren of today have been very seriously damaged by the New Deal and Communist crazes. A good author is almost always against the current politics of his country—indeed, I can think of no exceptions. The literary heroes of war time blow up quickly and never come back. The literary reviews for five or six years past have been whooping up all sorts of palpable quacks. It is as impossible for a writer to do good work on Communist terms as it would be for him to operate within the shadow of Holy Church. Good writing demands freedom above all things, and there can be no freedom in the face of an innocent faith.

My guess is that we'll come to blows with Russia soon or late, and that most of the writers who are now demanding a rapprochement will land behind barb wire. This is certainly not a pleasant prospect. Personally, I am in favor of the utmost freedom at all times,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but it has never existed in America, and there seems to be no sign that it will appear hereafter. Americans are an extraordinarily ignorant and stupid people, and hence bitterly dogmatic. Their common thinking is done in ways that forcibly suggest the theology of the Salvation Army.

H. L. MENCKEN

THE LIVES

"History is a grave and noble pageant," Landor said.
His family life at Gherardesca proved impossible.
In 1844 his daughter gave him Pomero, a dog.

The pictures blacken in their frames, the tassels on the bedspread
Fall. "He laughs like an ogre," Mrs. Browning said,
Who did not relish him the way her husband did.

Stuffed animals and birds, antiques of plaster gave
A tone to Boston. Santayana, who had stomach trouble
As a youth, once shook the hand

Of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Professor Norton
Lingered on. "No comfort, not a breath of love,"
Wrote Nietzsche, going mad. Booth Tarkington loved art.

"Well, history is a grave and noble pageant," Landor said.
"Or 'stately pageant' is perhaps the term."

On the neglected lawn, the iron dogs and the deer,
Rusted among the weeds, alert, indomitable, keep watch.

Weldon Kees

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Horace Gregory

THE BEGGAR ON THE BEACH

I have not come here to talk,
I have come to sit; I have been transplanted
From the cornerstone of a First National Bank
On a windy street to root myself
In pebbles, shells, and sand;
It is my shadow and not my arm
That holds out its fingers in an empty glove
Which might so easily be mistaken for a hand.

My silence is
The unheard cries of those who swim
Where no raft follows, where sails, masts, funnels
Disappear up-ocean into a wave that travels
Eastward beyond the thin horizon line;
At my left shoulder there is a cloud
That gathers into a storm
On a beach-crowded Sunday afternoon—
The cloud my shadow's twin in the tide's swell
Which churns gold waters into lead and silver
At its will.

Tell me my riddle:
I am not a mirage, but a being in flesh
Born of a sea that has neither
Waves nor shore, nor moon, nor star:
That was my misfortune. Have you a better
Fortune? are you forever young, handsome, rich
In friends? poor in fear? happy in doubt?
Sad in nothing? hopeful in dark?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Is that what you are? Or do you burn
As my veins burn with ceaseless heat?
Whether you answer me or not,
Even at noon, the disguise I wear
Is the body and rags of legless Kronos
Before God walked the sky. Look at me and his shade
Turns boardwalk holidays into a mile
Of broken bottles and twisted iron
Seen through a gray window in the rain.

Give it your homage,
The shadow is always here. Now you may drop
Your money in my hat.

Harold Kaplan

CAPTAIN CONSCIENCE

What was left in love then
When the soft soprano sang
And kissed the brain and the fume
Of your constant cigarette and wine
Floated on limp spread of silkened leg,
There then finally the pang
And ultimate sweetness in the dark.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What was left in love when exhaustion
Of kisses had tasted the crime and cried
Our victim's name and you wept for him,
Was love left in love when her faithless
Pleasure fled and let our guilt come in?

Adulterous love, I loved the ogre instinct
Which forced us there captured and restrained
To make a private tragedy and burn like fiends
The body of believing honor we once adored,
Before the dark and sweaty bed encumbered us.

The heart, the plucked heart, the ripened one,
Did fall to the wicked teeth and lips of love,
And I kicked the fallen master and beat his head,
Captain conscience on the floor,
Crippled for all tomorrows.

But he would be victor yet, I knew, and yes,
For his own grim hatred forced the door,
And there he was, to see us strewn
In splendid dishevel, in lazy hiccup
Of love, satiated by sucked mouths.

And if I did not see him, what was it
That punished me, that marched on frightened faces
And rode in clamorous accuse all that night
And shook me with his steel, his knife, and his rule?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Peggy Bennett

THE PAWN

Like a dream the dim parasite clung to him, the past sucking on his future.

Montague was born in a shack near Waycross, Georgia, his daddy the midwife. This was 1929. Willie Wassaman farmed a white man's land. He shared profits with Mr. Crooker. The good germs were rare in that land. The Okefenokee Swamp was in the next door country, and this soil was gray and mouldy like the contents of graves. The little farm sat out in the middle of nowhere, and all the Northerners arguing about the South left this out like a phantom.

Out in this vast homogeneous gully, Plymouth Rock chickens bathed in the dust and walked their colonies of ticks. Four hairy black sows and a hog laboriously hurtled like low chute logs, oinking and swimming in the bushes. A poor ribrocked Jersey cow roamed in desolate pastures, looming up austerely at sunset after cheating the buzzards, and seeming content to starve in mournful calm, puffing sighs through her great dark wet nostrils, and chewing dry grass with a gently waggling flattened chin. In this lonesome country each animal was an individual with powers.

Montague grew up thinking that the cow, Asia, was his mother. He did not remember feeding at Delia's breast, but he drank Asia's soft downy milk and saw Willie ruffle her soft hairy tan hide with the distorted earthy star of his brown lover's hand. Her head was a big pocket-book with enormous soft brown eyes given a wild anxiety by the black lines under them in the whitened tan face. Her whole head was drawn into the tapering nose. Willie swore that, under the marcelled ribs and the lagging skin, the heart was as big as a blessed angel's.

Willie had moments of cruelty. He cursed and kicked at the chickens when they did not lay their oval eggs in visible patches.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He chased the pigs away from the door.

He whipped Chester out-of-doors. Montague saw him do it, heard Chester's whimpers and screams, and was as savagely hurt as if his own breast had been ripped up, his bare heart exposed and whipped. Only Willie and Delia were parents and knew the right. Chester was eleven years old. He did not bleed any longer as Montague bled to see it.

In the windy blasts of March, Willie tilled the open fields with a borrowed mule, or, when no mule was to be borrowed, a hand plow. Wind nibbled him, and he marched behind the plow blind and drunk with the bitter Southern cold. The corn he raised was spectral and parched in the summers. Rains spoiled the potatoes. Bugs got into the peanut plants. The squash rotted. The watermelon vines bore a few little albino embryos, pale with malnutrition. Willie had a wild laugh.

As he sat in the evenings in the door of his shack and stroked the little protruding cranium and the long stiff nape of his dog, he had a hundred stories to regale himself.

"Bow at time I see at ole houn dawg git up on he hine laigs n wawk oah tuh duh doah, n I say tmah sef, Bawi, you see dat ole houn dawg wawkin on he two hine fee lak uh man? You crazy?" Etc.

One summer day it went off to die. Willie whistled for it until he was blue. Then in the sunny morning, when all the lacquered leaves were bright in this desert, he saw buzzards out over the low bush, the Pharioh's chickens. That was his hound dog.

There were two ruts which led across a wide empty field from the highway. Every year or so the white Mr. Crooker brought them a bushel basket full of old clothes and such delectables as dated motion picture magazines, empty and cheap perfume bottles, old clocks with immobile hands, and broken chairs. The front yard of the shack began to look like a junk yard.

One of Montague's earliest consolidate memories was of standing in the doorway, the sunlight wrinkling his embryonic brown face, while the white man talked to Willie and Delia about trying cucumbers. The white man sat behind the steering wheel of his Model T. His wife and children sat enthroned in the back seat. Willie and Delia stood like children down from them and out from the automobile.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Montague was about four-years-old. He had on a short faded pink shirt with buttons along its hem for the missing and matching britches. From his belly button down he was naked, slim and long. He stood and scowled in the sunlight, one arm flung over his forehead to shadow his eyes. He absorbed what he saw with primitive greed, and the tongue in his mouth would have waggled strange rote if they had encouraged him. Hadn't he heard Willie call the paler man curious names? And Montague was not moved into the world enough to know of sin and sinners, secrets and dark delusions.

Suddenly one of the paler children in the Model T espied him, the innocent nude, and furiously denounced him. His ears heard alarm without recognizing it. Everyone seemed to fling shots like fumes at him. The white woman drew the little girl's head down into her lap. The little girl sobbed aloud.

Then the sky resolved itself into a hard crystal, and the very surface of the earth seemed hostile. His stranger father came loping across the yard at him, clumsy in pistol-legged overalls. His immense knees and thighs were meaty, cat flexible, and his great feet were bare pads against the moist grainy soil. He shoved Montague inside, roughly.

Outside the Model T stood, full of the radiant creatures which had suddenly appeared in this infested air. That sweet gaunt little chariot. Here there were no windows, in this shack. It was like the county jail. No mobility, mildewed darkness, acrid with mustiness, lair of rats and the phantom dead. Montague wept bitterly beside the water bucket, his eyes little running spigots, and, like humans, he grieved. He wanted to be where everybody was, doing the things everybody did. This was the first law and they broke it.

Every time Willie had to talk to him the white man made a poor mouth. The poor mouth being always contagious, crabbed Willie came inside talking bitter disgust, like dusty speech, to Delia, who listened with a quiet leaf strained face. Then, in the evening, Willie laughed a wild laugh and told crazy stories, like the one about the wake he had attended, when the dead had been alive in a coma. The preacher stood with his back to the ironing-board on which she lay beneath the sheet, and as he preached she woke, the earthern dead woman, moving in mute weariness. She raised a hand and clawed away the sheet. Everybody in the room sat breathless and paralytic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She laboriously sat up, her gown over her fat thighs and lifted the mute sullen face of a sick woman to watch the preacher with uncomprehending eyes. He turned around to show her body with his elegantly shaking hand, preaching away with industrious sonority about how the dove of peace sat on her shoulder and the Lord had taken her to Jordan, dipped her, and water floated away her multitude of sins. At this moment she wiped sweat off her brow with her flabby upper arm, looked with woeful solemnity at her board, and lay down again panting. Then as she lay there the preacher reached a climax. "If this Sister had not prayed to the Lord and Savior she would be burning in hell." "Amen," she sighed weakly, and the preacher jumped through the window. This story, though he tell it a thousand times, never failed to amuse Willie. He sat and chuckled like a fiend.

Sometimes Delia asked herself, Delia, why did you marry Willie? Then she fretfully went to bed with him. He was warm. There was rich blood feeding his muscular meat. And he laughed a lot while he leaned back on the two hind legs of his chair. But she thought he was a fool. Work, poverty, starvation, for she sometimes starved herself so her little boys could eat with mumbling lips—they'd make even heaven dull.

Willie took great pride in Chester, the older boy. Delia favored Montague. Willie wanted to name Montague Coolidge, but Delia had had some schooling and run across the name he bore. Willie encouraged tomfoolery in Chester, but Delia hugged and beat Montague with a dry-eyed sorrow which was like cement to ambition. He was a muffled voice at her breast. Sensing the enormity of her misery, Montague grew to be a nervous child.

When they left the farm in the Spring they dragged Montague screaming down the dusty road, scorching the skin of his hind and his feet.

He was dressed in a pair of Willie's chopped off overalls, which bloomed around his slim smooth dark little body like a bucket. His small toes peered from under the fringe like tiny brown buds of flesh on pale soles.

His brother, Chester, was there in the worn knickers of some white boy. Chester was "looknun aftuh" Montague, dragging him along the ground.

Willie was in clean overalls, shoes slashed at the toes to make

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them big enough, their eyelets drawn together with string, and he wore a big red handkerchief around his neck like a scarf. His woman had a white woman's black satin dress on top her brown skin. It was ripped under the sleeves, but it had pieces of redeeming metal in the belt.

Willie had a feed bag full of rubble swung over his shoulder, and he looked like the traditional chicken thief.

They went to Tallahassee, where they lived in darktown. Willie got a job at the railroads and was gone all day. Montague was half out of his wits with the sight of many strange people and houses. He and Chester stood by the side of the sallow road, Chester grinning witlessly and Montague gazing at people with sober popeyes. Delia began disappearing everyday to a white folks house. One September, Montague went to school, where he was in the same grade as his brother, who was eight years older. Chester was always swaggering and clowning, but he was lazier than a geranium leaf. Dust collected on his brains.

For the first few days Montague said never a word, but sat in his desk with his little hands quietly closed like little clams in his lap. Sometimes he laid his little grimy hands with great self-consciousness on desk lid or seat. This was ceremonious. He swung his locked feet softly under his seat. They were bare, and they soughed the floor.

He shared his desk with a little boy called Rodduh. Sometimes Rodduh planted his little elbow on the desktop, put his chin in his cautious little hand, and turned sideways to scrutinize Montague passively. Rodduh was languid. His mouth always rested slightly open, in a natural breathing way, with his tongue lying stuffed out in it. "Whuhchu name?" he would say, and Montague would stiffen his neck and stare ahead as if his life depended on his fixity.

Rodduh's nose kept shedding little streams of mucus which he checked now and then by hard inhalation. Then he carefully and jealously snuffed it back up his nose. Sometimes Montague watched this with a quiet and disturbed look.

Montague was painfully at school. This room was as strange and terrible as a locomotive rushing by on the tracks in the countryside Montague watching from a far hill.

Everyday Montague learned something, but only by being forced to act or be hopelessly left in confusion. Little by little he thawed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Montague has a good mind," his teachers admitted uneasily. He embarrassed them in classes with the swift hard logic of an eight-, nine-, then a ten-year-old.

But they discouraged him and he became covert like those unseen dead stars in the skies; a small brown Nigger like an eel, head shaven bald and eyes big and gentle as the eyes of Jumbo the elephant. "It ain't gonner git you anywheres to be a smart Eleck," they said, a little sour and trumpety.

He once found two crayons, black and orange, and he drew all over walls pictures of black people in orange dress. My, how he did draw, smirking with satisfaction. For a week he was obsessed with it, but nobody said his pictures were as beautiful as those mysterious ones in the humdrum primer. His mother slapped his hands sharply. The school teachers reprimanded him sorely. Finally his mother, in a kind of anguish, seized his right hand by the wrist and shook it like a leaf in a storm, beating his hand against the wall until his knuckles felt cracked like roasted nuts and the flesh sang with pain. The skin was scraped and full of splinters. With a sore hand he guided his penny pencil over the thick rough pages of his nickel tablet. He did not draw again.

In Tallahassee he learned a little more of terror than he had known. So many individuals of different stripes to combat he longed for Asia and the scraggly chicken cannibals. Sometimes he sat stiffly against the wall of the porch, and tears spread beneath his half-closed eyelids, and his chest puffed and quivered perilously, as he dreamed bucolicly of sticks and leaves, the mole running underground leaving a cracked bunched trail of sod in a cultivated patch, the fragrance of the natural fertilizer of cowflop and chicken doodoo beautiful in his fresh quivering nostrils, and not much more fascinating than the dried pasty soil of wasp nests and their evil people.

When summer lay like a pall everywhere dark, smoke-colored clouds sometimes boiled up and muttered while they closed up the pore of the sky. Then Montague would run down to the railroad depot to take Willie an old rent slicker. He limped across gravel roads with crippled feet.

The two pink and pimply white men who sat on the station steps passed away the time of their train wait by teasing him. They threw pennies into tall weeds for him. Montague felt exhilarated. Then as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time drew near for the long overdue train to show up, they got up and went into the waiting room.

Montague followed them, strutting and giggling.

One man went into the men's toilet room. The other fell into conversation with a young yellow-haired girl with a sallow skin. He turned on Montague with a new face. "Okay, you little black son of an ape, beat it. We're through."

Montague thought he was kidding. Montague paraded in front of the empty benches, swaying his tight little hips like a girl, jubilant.

"Just a moment," said the young man to the girl. He picked up a stave and walked over to Montague, who quivered with expectant eagerness.

"Look here, little Nigger," he said with soft sweet poisonous drawl, "there's something I think you'd better learn. You're cute, but you're the ace-of-spades. When you hear a white man say get out, get out. Run. Be greased lightening. GIT."

He pulled back the stave as if he were going to whang Montague. Montague flew out the door, amazed and fantastically hurt. The man flung the stave loosely after him, cursed, dusted his hands; and returned to his conquest, which was pleasant and easy.

Willie worked too much in icy rains that winter, when drops were seeds from the freeze and melted inside his collars and up his sleeves, while he bogged in clay glue and pulp, hurting with cold. He died of pneumonia in 1938. Delia took in washings. She bent over the outdoor tubs in withering cold. Willies did not wake from his coma, and his wild laughter was heard only in the chimney and through the walls, where the wind whistled like so many dead voices speaking with false teeth. The wallboards were nailed up vertically like fence palings in a rough hoarding. The wind penetrated its pores like machetes. The floor boards spewed freshets of cold breezes. The discarded posters Montague found in the alley behind the motion picture palace and the thick brown wrapping paper were tacked over these holes. The vibrant paper hummed like paper-covered combs, puffed and snapped along the walls.

The soap for the laundry Delia made herself, out of urine and ashes. She squeezed it with her bare hands into hard little spinal bones, and she drubbed clothes with it like a mad woman. Overhead pear trees dropped languid scabby leaves into the bescummed tubs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Montague quit school in the sixth-grade to help her boil and rinse in the big black sooty pot which stood three-legged on a knoll of ashes in the back yard. He poked the steamy masses of sheets and towels with the handle of an old broom. Chester took Willie's job, moving monumental crates and boxes all day long. The world was gray as priests and nuns. Montague spent days shivering, all his clothes piled on his back, the agony intimate, in his marrow.

Finally Montague was able to take a job of his own, after Delia had pleaded for him. He went to work for a grocery man. The groceryman was aged without vigor. He had a belly like a big soft melon, and he sat in a rocker philosophizing. The flies sat on his cheeses and apples, rubbing their little sticky feet together and preening wings, while he moaned about the temperatures and talked in a monotone and wheeze about what he believed.

He gave Montague the job because he could work Montague harder and pay him less than the white youngster he'd had in mind. Montague worked six days a week for two dollars a week. Mr. Sweeney assured him that this was A-1 experience.

He was a good man. Sometimes he talked about the filthy thieving Niggers, but he reassured Montague kindly that all Niggers weren't alike. The only thing that really bothered him, he said, was the smell. Niggers smelled bad to him. Of course they don't tub much, he said with a dry laugh, but they've got that African smell and no amount of white soap and perfume would remove it. "No matter how they scour they always smell sour," he chanted proudly.

"Can you smell me?" said Montague nervously, his eyes big.

"Fee Fi Fo Fum, I smell Montague Wassamun," said Mr. Sweeney. Then he put his newspaper up to cover him and shook with laughter until his belly was sore.

But Mr. Sweeney was kind. He encouraged Montague in rascality and exhibitionism and ruled him with gloved iron, he thought. He seemed affable, if not affectionate. Montague grew poised and roguish in his employment. He grew tall and slim, wore striped knitted sweaters off white boys' backs, and greased his black krinkled hair carefully. Mr. Sweeney raised him three dollas a week to five dollars the first year. In bad times three dollars is not meaningless, and then Montague had acquired the habit of sneaking a dime or a nickel whenever he could, or a can of tomatoes, a package of cheese crackers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He was not devoted to the old man as Mr. Sweeney cunningly thought him. He knew with devastating directness that Mr. Sweeney thought of him with the same affection he thought of a roach. There was a cold strain in Montague, perhaps born in those early years of terror. Asia had probably gone to some slaughterpen.

Meanwhile, as Montague reached his teens, he found a wild salacious gift in himself. He had always loved himself, body and soul, through torment and health, having the fires of energy burning throughout him. Delia tried to take care of soul by taking him to the Baptist Church. If he demurred she beat him.

Delia remembered him most tenderly as a small figure there, usually dancing to restrain the impulse of urination. She remembered his thin hard little torso, the curved back as he sat like a fruit on the seat, his sharp shoulder blades, the assumed languor in his half-closed eyelids on his dark smooth hub face.

The little flattened nose wrinkled and sniffed continuously, he remembering these prayer meetings mostly by smells, as he remembered the privyjohn, menstruating women, the old white woman with citronella, his father's underarm odors. But he had been thrilled in the hubbub.

Delia remembered this time with heavy breasts, both for Willie and the baby love Montague had been.

But Montague was no pilgrim. He reached adolescence believing the Bible wrong. This was a tough conclusion for which he had the fashionable incitements of Mr. Sweeney to thank.

Now Montague took to hanging himself like a hat on girls, proudly a young criminal in intent. He was glib and easily persuasive with his hands. One by one castles fell. He could steal small bars of chocolate candy. First he was proud of being able to kiss a girl on the cheek. Then one let him hug her. The same girl let him tenderly squeeze her breast and run his hands over her smooth shanks with a vagrant dreaming air.

Then one girl, who laughed a lot, let herself be chased into an empty shed one late afternoon, where she let him look at her body, strangely moved herself to see his hands shake as he leafed her clothing. He felt as if his veins would burst. They sealed each other's lips with a kiss, and Montague promptly went out on the streets and bragged of his luck to other eager-eyed panting young Lotharios. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next time he saw her she shrilled accusations at him. His resentment was aroused, and he laughed an ugly laugh. From then on her looks were dark with hatred. She sniffed as she walked by him. Her heart was crushed and romantically loving.

This was all of first magnitude. He was a wolf. Delia scolded him frenziedly when he came home in the dark. He glowed like the lamp, a lightning bug. She was incensed at his foolishness, and beat him with the head of a broom.

In 1942 he stole a canned ham, and Mr. Sweeney fired him, saying coldly, as if humming to himself, as he turned his back on the dismissed Negro boy, "Well, I should have known. A Nigger. That's a smell you can't wash off." Montague was thus terribly shaken by his own doublecross, yet all the time he felt as if there were justice in his actions. There was no love coming his way from Mr. Sweeney.

The war was falling like manna on many poor-whites and Negroes, for the draft was removing young first citizens to far away and near-by camps for military training. A succession of fine jobs passed through Chester's hands and he went to Carabelle to work at Camp Gordon Johnston as a day laborer at fifty-one cents per hour. Delia got a fine job working at the Florida State College for Women as a cleaning woman. Montague worked for a bowling alley and was able to buy a bicycle. With this bicycle he rivaled the white gods. He flew like a bat through the dusk. His bicycle was secondhand, blue and white. Furthermore, with the new money afloat, he and Delia became addicts of the movies. He could be found every Saturday night there, howling and hooting among the "dark cloud" in the balcony, after which he went to work again.

In 1944 he was sixteen and he grew old. He met Julia first, on the last row in church. Julia aged him with her beauty and unfathomable shyness and emotionalism. She was usually quiet. Her wide mouth spread in serene smiles. She was neither silly nor amusing like most girls, probably because she was lonely and a stranger. She seemed to be about twenty-six. He thought he was in love with a much older woman, and he palpitated sore.

Montague got alone with her in the church yard during a hymn. They stood in a corner of the yard, in sand and sandspurs behind a Spanish-bayonet plant. Montague was testy with yearning. "You noo heah," he said accusingly, and throbbed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah, I come tuh live wif mah aunt," she said in her light shy way, timidity struggling with respectfulness in her face. Silence pierced them with its jagged beak and paralyzed them. They panted and sweated to speak, for they each had a private yearning, a sore tender spot, and respect for each other's fine features.

"How ole er you?" he finally blustered, in agony, whirling round and round, afraid he would scare her and wound himself. Already he had identified her solidly with his lonely and hungry soul.

"I foteen," she said sadly, thinking this was the end.

His crumbled in amazement. Then he felt good. He looked at her with new reverence. "Foteen," he murmured, hearing celestial winds where a tattered breeze pushed through the gray moss beards. So young and cute she was. "I sixteen," he said with dignity. "Thas mah bahcycle," and they strolled toward the church. They had further meetings under the moss-bearded Spanish oaks in the church yard.

Then Montague received a wonderful offer of a job on the ice truck. The United States Army was absorbing men off ice trucks all over the forty-eight states, starching them, soiling them, pushing them around. He accepted this job with vim and love for all those who bossed him with the slightest charm of manner.

He felt as if he were living to the full. He stretched luxuriantly in front of Sonny, another Negro helper, and said proudly, "Man, I'm a man." And he was only distilled sixteen.

Eighteen dollars a week. Why, he was a millionaire.

For a year and a half he "went with" Julia, and the whole time she played emotional havoc with him, in her saintly way, which all the while his outraged body grumbled at, because he thought her goodness faintly evil. Silently turbulent, he waited on her patiently. He grew moody; he felt unfinished.

One day she let him play with her, and all her admirable structure of purity and piety collapsed. One week later she let him play too long with her, and suddenly she had lost childhood forever. She got up, pulling her skirt down moodily, dazed and trembling. Yet the idea had hold of her like a disease. She thought wildly of eating saltpeter. Her imagination spilled over with strange desires to have some dark faceless wildman come scrambling from behind rocks, trees, whatever hid her from him, seize her and kill her in sexual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

embrace. She would put Montague off for a month. Then she would suddenly give way to a morbid desire to go the whole way toward age, to burn herself out, like a hot metal can plunged into water. She yearned for one splendid moment of violence and swift and complete collapse.

Someone had long ago told her it was nasty. Someone had made her craven with fear of it. These revels had madness in them. Old sensations she had long known, hunger to be caressed as some mother had caressed her, hunger to be precious as the beribboned child, were being fed on Montague's stimulations. Her aunt was urging her to marry him. But her imagination and ambition were never full content with the boy. She wanted a hard grown man to grovel at her feet.

All the Negro girls were "going" with the Negro soldiers from Camp Gordon Johnston. At night any shadowy place was apt to contain lovers. Surreptitiously Julia began walking around the blocks where Negro soldiers were thickly found. The more she walked the more her hunger grew. She was the kind of girl who let her secretive and emotional face be her lure, and who withdrew to let a man advance. In this way she got herself pregnant, and when six weeks were past she let Montague know that she had new life within her. Poor Montague grew wild, thinking himself responsible, and what would Delia say. Julia looked at him with quiet and coolness. She did not accuse him. She did not demand that he marry her. He felt bewildered and broken in his bonds.

He got to the ice plant three days after the atom bomb was dropped to learn that Merle Dwiggins, the white boy whose job he'd taken, was on his way home from Europe.

While the machinery crashed and the huge pumping engines sounded like the audible pulse of the earth, he stood still and died.

Richard Longenecker, his bossman, whom he had revered and worked for like an eager beaver, said, "Of course, we want you to stay on until Merle actually gets here. You see that."

"Yessuh," said Montague huskily. The atom bomb was no more to him. He went to work. The white men still treated him with good-natured unconcern, but they didn't want him or care that he wanted them. They had a boy coming. Montague's source of spiritual and monetary wealth was gone, sucked down a hungry drain. A white boy who'd been fighting and occupying Europe, a hero Veteran was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

coming. Envy cramped his bowels, and he was a sick man. So they were "letting" him go.

The truck, the big chains which moved steadily up one side to descend another in rotary train, the vast black grease-grimed machinery he had had the illusion of being one with—the transformers, the power, the ignited fuel and saturate action, his own exhilarated brain, gears, muscles, and ice, the truck and the iceman—the wedded were rent asunder.

The days flew at him like bullets. He walked around in a shock. Julia was getting bigger and bigger in his feverish eyes; her still small mound of belly looked big to him. Any day it would be known, and how could he take her now? He had no job.

Enough that people would snicker and say it was all right, worse had happened before. The new mode among Negroes was more concerted and bitter, an insistence on the remnants of dignity. He dreamed at night of Asia, and he felt once more sixteen-years-old.

He got off one Saturday night, wrung into a knotted hawser of tight strained nerves. He received his salary under the naked little droplight. Sweat was running in rivulets down his dark shiny skin.

"You needn't come back anymore, Montague," they said. There was a husky boy standing among them like Jesus. He had a ruptured duck button on his tan uniform. "Yeah, I want to get right to work," he was saying. "I don't want to lose no time. I missed the ole place. Them Dago girls didn't fassnate me none."

"No, you needn't come to work Monday, Montague," they said absently and kindly, as he pressed silently toward them. "It isn't necessary."

NOT NECESSARY?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT NECESSARY?

He went straight through the furry night toward the house in which Julia lived. The mist blew itself up and wrapped around the moon, a wraith of a woman. There were little torques of breezes in the smoky pool of the air.

He stopped instead in a little store on this side of her house. There was Sonny inside. "I heah you goh tha can tuhniii," drawled Sonny.

Montague had a hallucination, drawn from his fears. Sonny had spread the news. They were laughing at him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Montague slapped Sonny across the face. Sonny lunged, and they fell, rolling.

Montague suddenly found that his tense muscles were actually weak from the exhaustion of the last three weeks. Somewhere a blue jar fell to the floor with a crash, and Sonny got hold of the end of it. In slow agony Montague held Sonny's wrists in a tight squeezed grip and watched the broken neck of the blue bottle descend. Montague turned his head and felt the puncturing of his cheek.

Then everybody was down on Sonny, who was twenty-six, for cutting a boy.

Montague got to his feet. No one restrained him. He ran home in the night, softly bleeding warm spurting blood. He was something new again, and would be his new self as long as men could see and he wore his purple scar.

At home he had time to think about this. No laments helped him. He lay in bed and wracked his brain for answer non-forthcoming. Delia was bitter. Her fingers burned him. He slept trying to shut his world out, and succeeded in dreaming of Asia.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nicola Chiaromonte

MALRAUX AND THE DEMONS OF ACTION (II)*

What were the intellectual motives of Malraux's allegiance to Communism *as an idea* from 1925 to 1939?

The strongest one was probably the notion of "virile fraternity." Insofar as it took the form of "revolutionary combat," Communism for Malraux gave back to the individual, made sterile by bourgeois egocentrism, "his fertility," the absolutely fundamental sense of *belonging* to a definite time, a definite place, and a specific milieu, without which authentic norms of conduct, and even a true understanding of the self, cannot be born. This was a strong idea, and a deeply felt need. Its psychological roots could perhaps be found in what Kyo says at one point in *Man's Fate*: "Men are not my brothers: they are those who look at me, and judge me. My brothers are those who look at me, and love me." "Virile fraternity" means a type of human relationship cleansed of both sentimentality and suspicion, in which the individual will feel both "left alone" and trusted, hence essentially encouraged: "fertile."

This is, for Malraux, the ideal social situation. Its opposite is bourgeois individualism, in which the individual (like the capitalist Ferral in *Man's Fate*) is the prisoner of a loathsome kind of narcissism, can never see in the other person anything but the reflection of his own self, is condemned either to use the other individual as an instrument or to yield to masochistic sentimentality in his presence.

Because he condemned this kind of individualism, Malraux also condemned the equivocation by which, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the cause of art had become identified with

* The first part of this essay was published in the July issue of PARTISAN REVIEW.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that of individualism. "Artistic individualism," he points out in the preface to *Days of Wrath,* "is justified only insofar as it is applied to the domain of feeling and dream. . . . What destroys the work of art is not passion, but the will to prove." The consequence was that it was perfectly legitimate to think not of a "Communist art," which was absurd, but of an art inspired by the acceptance of a "Communist situation."

Malraux's *intellectual* position with regard to Communism and the Soviet Union in the late thirties could be summarized by saying that he was perfectly willing to accept them as starting points, but not at all ready to adopt the official ideology that was supposed to be corollary of such a stand. Hence, in 1934, at the Soviet Writers' Congress in Moscow, he launched an attack against "Socialist realism," and also against the notion that the artist should bow to a "line": "Art," he said, "is not a submission: it is a conquest . . . if Marxism is the consciousness of the social, culture is the consciousness of the psychological. . . . The refusal of the psychological, in art, leads to the most absurd individualism. Every man, whether he wants it or not, tries to *think* his own life. The refusal of the psychological can mean only one thing, namely that he who will have reached the deepest consciousness, instead of transmitting his experience to his fellow men shall keep it to himself."

The argument was a telling one as far as it went. But, of course, the attempt to draw a line between state dictation in society and in art was doomed. In order to connect the Soviet Union with *his* ideal of a new *culture* based on "virile fraternity," Malraux had to overlook a fact which is central in modern times, namely the implications of total state power. Yet the argument was significant insofar as it revealed the one value on which Malraux was not ready to compromise: the *quality* of human experience, and its highest form, art. Art was going to appear to him more and more as the supreme form of human energy: a "conquest" superior to all others.

Malraux was a strange communist anyway. He did not only contend that party officials had nothing whatever to say in the matter of culture and ideas. He also maintained that Stalin, Thorez, and Aragon, could *do* what they liked, but they shouldn't try to tell him, Malraux, what the *meaning* of Communism was. The claim was insolent, and the Communist hierarchy (which had no authority over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malraux, since he was not a party member) answered it by keeping this peculiar spokesman for Communism under constant suspicion, and spreading a number of slanderous rumors against him. The writer haughtily ignored the slander, and went his way, maintaining a self-imposed discipline which consisted of a single rule: he would call himself a communist, and not raise any political fuss, as long as it was at all justifiable to consider the C.P. the instrument of a universal cause, and the Soviet Union as the power center of this cause.

What Malraux expected from Communism was not any leap from necessity into freedom, but a redeeming transformation of Western culture. In 1935, speaking at the antifascist Writers' Congress in London, Malraux described the Communist task as follows: "To recreate the phantom heritage which lies about us, to open the eyes of all the sightless statues, to turn hopes into wills and revolts into revolutions, and to shape thereby, out of the age-old sorrows of man, a new and glowing consciousness of mankind."

Surely, those were a poet's reasons. If one had asked Malraux how he could prove that there was a necessary connection between his grandiose vision and the peculiar style of the C.P., between Stalin's transcendental philistinism and the "sightless statues," the answer would no doubt have been: "I don't see any other *force* in the world, today, which could reasonably be connected with the realization of such a hope. Do you?" A *realistic* vision, then. Or should one say: a visionary realism? It was, in fact, in the name of an apocalyptic dream of Hope and Power coming together like the Lion and the Lamb in Isaiah that Malraux rejected as irrelevant the prosaic warnings of common sense and factual evidence: the objection raised by the particular against the general.

It was not Hope, however, but the *will to act* in the face of impending doom, that pushed Malraux. In 1935, to one of those pathetic Popular Front crowds that used to meet at the *Salle de la Mutualité,* in Paris, he announced not Bread, Peace and Liberty, but the Coming War. "We may die in it, but we shall not die without having been in it," he cried. If war was inevitable, then surely ideologies, party lines, and the naive hopes of the crowds, were mere details. The real question was that of Western culture as a whole, of Western man and his future: whether, in our time, man could find a way of mastering history, or would succumb to it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malraux's break with communism came in 1939, with the Hitler-Stalin pact. There, unmistakably, was *betrayal*: the official notice served to the world that from then on the Soviet Union (and its agencies, the Communist parties) meant the Soviet State, and no longer a universal cause. Malraux then decided that there was only one thing for him to do: to be in the war against Hitler. That was the only way to be consistent with the logic of history betrayed by Communism. He enlisted as a private in the Tank Corps.

Before the Pact, however, there had been the Spanish War. There, really, the "sickness unto death" of the European Left, and of Europe itself, had begun. There also, in spite of appearances, and of what he himself would have been willing to admit, Malraux found himself for the first time at odds with the logic of Stalinism.

Malraux was in Madrid when Franco's revolt broke out. He saw something unforgettable: the first, almost miraculous, upsurge of popular spontaneity and courage. The Canton and Shanghai insurrections might have appeared as engineered and led from above. But in Barcelona and Madrid, the people had taken everything into their hands, and won, *almost*. Malraux went back to Paris, and told the popular audiences there of two things: the extraordinary courage of the Spaniards, and the powerlessness of courage against the instruments of modern warfare. He launched the slogan "Planes and guns for the Spanish people," and, with a group of influential friends, started out to organize the smuggling of planes, guns, and volunteer pilots, into Spain. The French C.P. remained aloof, and recommended the sending of ambulances and bandages. Later on, when Malraux had begun to form his escadrille, the Spanish communists circulated the rumor that the planes had really been sent by Thorez & Duclos. Malraux could hardly have liked that.

Yet, without Soviet tanks and planes, Franco would have won in 1936. Before this fact, all the rest became secondary for Colonel Malraux. He accepted the Communist line in Spain as being identical with the supreme necessity of war. He refused to see that military logic meant turning the Spanish war into a senseless slaughter. He refused to consider the fact that things like the massacre of the Barcelona anarchists, in May 1937, were not only debasing the dignity of the Spanish cause, but also attacking its physical energies. It was logical that, in March 1937, when, in connection with the Moscow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Trials, Leon Trotsky asked Malraux to state publicly whether or not he had seen him, Trotsky, in Royan in 1934, Malraux refused to answer. It was logical, since the writer considered himself bound by discipline not to say anything on such "controversial" matters as the trials. But surely, there, logic was preventing Malraux from acting rightly. Since he had always had great admiration for Trotsky, he could hardly have failed to feel the sting of the incident.

In Spain, once again, while siding with man, Malraux pleaded the case of fate. Spain, however, and the true nature of things, avenged themselves. *Man's Hope* is a halting, uncertain, fragmentary book. The case of coldblooded efficiency is argued again and again, inconclusively, with nothing like the vigor it had when it was defended by Garin. There are too many characters, too many people; so many that it becomes clear that the event is anonymous, or rather, a purely collective one. Hence, the opposition between the communist, the anarchist and the intellectual, which was so vigorously stated in the preceding novels, becomes uncertain, and finally breaks down. The characters seem to be themselves aware that there are too many sides to the question, too many disturbing details, for any logic to claim a conclusive victory. Finally, what Malraux has to say is that the first moment of hope, confidence, and heroism (what he calls the "apocalypse") in a popular insurrection is a marvelous and unique manifestation which the rationality of war cannot take seriously. What follows is the wasting away of hope. But this implies that the Communist, the man concerned exclusively with the "means," is, at best, a taskmaster. He arrives when fate has already spoken, and sets up a bureau to enforce its decrees. As far as the real substance and meaning of the story are concerned, he can only play the part of Doom.

Insurrection may be romantic, but war is, after all, a frightful drudgery. Drudgery once accepted, an earnest man cannot avoid the next discovery, namely that if there is any significance in it, it comes from the patience, the sorrows, the humble dignity of the people who are the instruments and the victims of the bloody toil. The individual, with all his incongruities, and his ungovernable virtues, reasserts his presence; within the behaviour of the individual, the community's presence is shown, the bonds between one man and the other, which no written law has created, and which no taskmaster's injunction can really control, but only crush. We come upon the mystery of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man, in the gap between History and the myriads of stories that go to make it up.

"The mystery of man" is the theme of Malraux's latest novel, *Les Noyers de l'Altenburg*. There is no ideology in this book, which treats two episodes from the two successive wars that have laid Europe waste. The narrator, a Frenchman, is taken prisoner, in 1940. Around him, his fellow prisoners, Arabs, Senegalese, Frenchmen, hungry and cold, write letters to their families, make up grotesque myths about the war. Like Kassner in *Days of Wrath* (but not *alone* in a cell, like Kassner), the narrator is *forced* to contemplate and wonder. "A writer, what has haunted me for ten years, if not man? Now I am here, confronted with the original stuff. . . . " He thinks of his father, a scholar who, after the failure of a strange adventure in Turkey, had come back to Europe just in time to become a German officer in the First War (he was an Alsatian). Before going to war, he had had the time to test, in the company of several eminent scholars, how brilliantly inadequate were the attempts of Western intellectuals to find a definition of man beyond the utter relativity of historical knowledge. In the war, this M. Berger had had two fundamental experiences. The first was nausea while witnessing the efforts of a German intelligence officer to get a small boy to reveal the identity of a woman spy, supposedly the child's mother. Then, M. Berger participated in the first experiment with mustard gas, made by the Germans on the Russian front. The scene (easily the most poignant image of pity and horror described by Malraux) is preceded by a significant insistence on the quality of the "raw material" of history: the German soldiers who are going to "exploit" the effects of the gas on the enemy. Like the prisoners of 1940, they tell dirty stories, play cards, mythologize about the war: between them and what is going to happen there is an utterly sardonic disproportion. Finally, the gas is launched, the German infantry sent out. The landscape remains empty and silent for a while. Then all of a sudden, on an earth on which nature itself has been monstrously killed, a few figures appear, followed by more and more, until the whole scene is crowded with German soldiers, coming back each with a scorched Russian on his shoulders. The horror has been too great. Everything collapses under the weight of a speechless pity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

M. Berger also picks up a stricken Russian, then realizes that he is himself poisoned: "there was nothing left in him except a forlorn hatred against everything that had prevented him from being happy."

However, it is not pity that gives poetic meaning to the scene. Beyond pity, what we have is a glimpse of doomsday: humanity transgressing into the inhuman. (The book was finished before Hiroshima). Clearly, that collapse is only an incident: those men will be as incapable of stopping the machinery of which they are both the tools and the victims as they are unable to withstand the first shock of that new horror. They simply don't know what they are doing, or what's happening to them. Hence, if there is any salvation, it must come to them from the outside, in the form of some extraordinary act, a messianic intervention of some sort. Pity is of no avail.

The last part of the novel focuses again on the prison camp, in 1940, and it closes on a contemplative note: "The mystery . . . which connects through an overgrown path what is shapeless in my comrades to the nobility which lies ignored in man: the victorious part, in the only animal which knows that it must die." In the village, barns, ploughs, wells, recall the Bible and the Middle Ages, become symbols of the immemorial "works and days" of man. The smile of an old woman announces "the discovery of a simple and holy secret."

Simple perhaps, and also general. Between Malraux and the particular incident, or the particular individual, there remains the same everlasting distance as between Achilles and the tortoise in Zeno's paradox. Nobody in particular is behind that smile, or in that village. Face to face with the "original stuff," the narrator sees in it symbols of the permanence of the "simple" beyond the turmoil of history. The "simple" could be the native soil, France; it could be the notion that, no matter how fateful, a historical event is only the surface, not the core, of human existence; or it could be both. The "discovery" remains ambiguous, a private affair. In any case, we can hardly believe that the smile of an old woman is an answer to Malraux's transcendental (and ultimately unanswerable) question. Who, in fact, but an exceptional individual, an artist, a hero (or a saint?) could bridge the gap between History and man, retrace the "overgrown path" that connects the shapelessness (and the helplessness) of the ordinary individual with "the nobility that lies ignored in him"? A revelation seems to be needed, or rather, a redeeming act.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Should we relate this to the notion of the "liberal hero" to which Malraux has made a reference in his conversation with James Burnham? The "liberal hero" is, it seems, the man who unites "strength of will," energy, decisiveness in action (hence contempt for the opportunism of the liberal politician) to a clear consciousness of the "nobility" of man and a profound respect for cultural values. A kind of humanized (and humanistic) Garin. Significantly enough, Malraux sees the prototype of the "liberal Hero" in T. E. Lawrence, the soldier of fortune and Oxford intellectual who (like Perken of *The Royal Way*) almost succeeded in leaving "a scar on the map."

Lawrence's, however, was a definite dream of political accomplishment in the Middle East: "hustling into form the new Asia." Malraux's own enterprise is the most general a modern intellectual can conceive of. Its themes are not only the dialectics of will and destiny; the mystery of man; the ambiguity of History; Western values, but the rescue of all this through action: the "restoration of structure and vigor" to Western culture, and the sense that this must be accomplished in an extreme situation, hence through a series of violent acts.

Malraux now attributes such an aim to De Gaulle with respect to France, which he would not do if he had not first thought of it himself, in a much broader context. Aside from mutual sympathy and respect, Malraux and De Gaulle find what is probably their deepest reason for agreement in the fact that they both conceive of contemporary politics in terms of the inevitability of the Third World War or, in any case, of the global struggle between East and West, and of the role France is called to play in it. The rest, for both of them, is only a function of this central fact. Malraux never liked political liberalism and democracy anyway. On this, no doubt, he found it easy to agree with the General. On the other hand, since he has gone through the experience of totalitarian politics, and of its demand for the unconditional surrender of culture; and since he is perfectly aware that, after Hitler, people expect something besides appeals to authoritarian messianism, Malraux now insists on "cultural" democracy and "cultural" liberalism. "To seek protection for freedom today through a liberal political structure is pure folly," he told Burnham. The only choice left is to trust the "liberal" will of the "man of destiny." Finally Malraux's strongest argument in favor of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gaullism is the same he eventually gave in defense of his Communist stand, namely that there is no other *force* capable of doing what has to be done. Once Communism is rejected, Gaullism is the only possible bet. And, when one is Malraux, one has to bet.

Like all political realists, Malraux (in his own peculiar way) applies to the present social situation the principle of the excluded middle. But, as Valéry once said, "there is always a middle term, and it cannot be excluded." In social matters, this seems to be particularly true, since society is what least resembles a logical problem, or a *Kriegspiel*. There are millions of people in Europe, today, who feel bewildered, disillusioned, and worse, and who still resist the either/or logic which the situation seems to impose. They are too distressed to believe in wholesale solutions. In fact, for many of them wholesale solutions are synonymous with catastrophe. They may occasionally cast their ballots for this or that party, but at bottom they are filled with doubt. Their doubt, too, is a sort of gamble. Namely a gamble on the chance that some sensible choice might be offered to them: a choice that makes sense in terms of their own daily existence rather than in the abstract language of geopolitics. If, in the meantime, they are confronted with Fate, they will, of course, be unable to do anything but bow to it. These people may not be a political force, but they certainly constitute a political fact. Couldn't even a man of action be tempted to take up their cause? In any case, such people cannot be treated with contempt just because they are too scattered and uncertain to constitute a mass. After all, Western culture owes much of its "vigor" precisely to the fact that, in the face of dogmatism, Western man has known how to insist on the positive value of doubt and disbelief. Doubt, of course, is not a political act. But the burden of the proof falls on him who asserts. When Malraux proclaims that only by making the State strong can freedom be saved, his is an assertion which, in 1948, is adequately answered by disbelief.

The truth of the matter is that Malraux may be proved right only in one sense: the weakness of the Third Force, combined with the disintegration of the Left so successfully brought about by the Stalinists, migh well result in De Gaulle's coming to power. As for the rest, there is no more connection between the "restoration of structure and vigor" to Western culture and the State machine which De Gaulle might be able to build up, than there was in the past

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between "virile fraternity" and the Communist Party. The two orders of facts are related now (as they were in the past) only by Malraux's own decision that they be so. Eventually, Gaullism cannot be for him anything but the latest development of the implacable need to act by which he is possessed.

In his *Aesthetic of the Cinema* (1946), speaking of the search for movement in Baroque art, Malraux writes: "What the frantic gestures of the Baroque world are calling for, is not a modification of the image, but *a succession of images* . . . the cinema." This search for dynamic movement, and the cinema, are in their turn connected with "the fanatical need for the *Object* itself, essential to the West, and related to its political conquest of the world." Here, Baroque art, and the cinema, come to occupy a place in the same view of history which led the young Malraux to say that the West is "committed to the test of the *act,* hence pledged to the bloodiest fate"; and also to wonder "what could become of a reverie which would borrow from intelligence the means to force upon the world the acceptance of its folly."

What indeed, except Malraux's own enterprise, and the visionary realism on which it is founded? The "cinematic" urge he attributes to the Baroque is also his deepest drive. It is what gives his ideas the peculiar quality of being not simply ideas, but outlines of gestures calling for a succession of external movements; and also what makes his vision demand so imperiously to be acted out, made into an object belonging to the real world.

Finally, André Malraux has pushed to its extreme consequences that modern pragmatic impulse which tends to see in the world of action the only reality, and, what is more, to reject any proposition which cannot be directly translated into a force, an act, or a series of acts; hence, as a matter of principle, to give preference to the possibility of a gesture over the elusiveness of a meaning—an impulse which obviously stems from a radical despair of truth.

Quite logically, Malraux sees the climax of such a passion in world historical action. But then action appears to him as the ground of chance and fate: discontinuous in essence and, from the point of view of the individual who is inevitably seeking a unity of some sort, absurd. Caught between the irrational test of the act, and the will

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to escape the ambiguities of pure thought, where can a man find a norm excluding sheer "folly" except in a zone intermediary between truth and dream, in a sense of quality suggested not by any abstract idea but by a pattern of images: a plastic form of some sort?

This is the sense in which one can speak of aestheticism, in Malraux. He is too keenly aware of the implications of his own attitude to see in action anything but the occasion of a struggle whose motives must be those that are most avowable in human history: cultural values and qualities. Qualities and values are what is at stake in action. Their meaning, however, lies beyond its sphere, and can be found only in the forms which visibly express it: the forms of art, man's supreme "conquest." Because art appears to him the highest form of action, Malraux cannot avoid seeing the ultimate intent of his enterprise mirrored in the world of artistic forms as in a strangely baroque frieze illustrating the *battle* between Man and Destiny.

Malraux's latest work is *The Imaginary Museum.* The book expresses Malraux at his best. It is a unique attempt to reinterpret the whole history of art from the point of view of modern art and its effort to come to grips with the world outside of all conventions and canons. It is impossible to summarize the wealth of dazzling *aperçus* and bold generalizations which make of this volume a kind of extraordinary intellectual rhapsody. One can only isolate from it the dominant theme, which is the ambiguity of modern man as reflected in his artistic adventure. On one side, Malraux sees in the modern artist "the will to submit everything to his style, beginning with the rawest object, and the barest. His symbol is *The Chair,* by Van Gogh." On the other side, this will to control the given, and to impose on the world of appearances the rigor of style, reveals itself to be a demonic will to destroy all forms rather than yield to the deceitful seduction of external appearances: "The artists know how false has become any accord of man with himself (and with the world). . . . The accord of man with himself has become *the* lie, the infamy that must be crushed. From Cézanne to the surrealists, the modern painter is a fanatic. . . . (The artists) look for all sorts of worlds except the one that is imposed on them."

Because of a profound need for truth and authentic expression, art has ceased to be a representation of the external world submitted to the canons of the "ideal beauty." The disappearance of the world,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

however, means the emergence of the obscure and of the demoniacal, rather than of any truth. "The domain of the demoniacal is the domain of everything which, in man, aims at his destruction. The demon of the Church, the demon of Freud, and the demon of Bikini, have the same face. . . . Satan paints only in two dimensions. . . . If compared to the nineteenth century, our century appears as a Renaissance of Fate. The Europe of ghostlike cities is not more devastated than the idea of man it had created."

No sooner has Malraux said this, however, than he tries to show the opposite, namely the existence, in modern art, of a classical urge: "A humbly imperious simplification, the same which made the authority of Cézanne, and which has brought about the resurrection of Bach, connects in a common style the works of Piero della Francesca, El Greco, Latour, Vermeer, Goya, with the frieze of Olympia and the Romanesque statues. Emerging together with the barbaric Renaissance, hailed and recognized with it, this style is possibly the greatest style created by the West."

At this point, one cannot help noticing how much more forceful than this attempt to discover the signs of a new classicism is Malraux's description of the demoniacal, and his response to it. It is hard indeed to see any community of style between Piero della Francesca and Goya, Cézanne and the Greeks. Or, if such a community exists, then where is the borderline between the demonic and the classical?

Not even in the domain of forms can Malraux forget the question that haunts him. He needs a norm for his action, an indication about the future, a principle of "structure and vigor." Driven as he is by the demon of the act, it is to the classical that he aspires. The world of forms appears to him agitated by the same Furies as the world of action. Yet he is determined to find in the artistic consciousness of our time the signs of a classical urge. If they could be clearly discerned, such signs would be far more convincing to Malraux than intellectual speculations, or the gamble of action. Questioned by him, however, art echoes his question. David's harp could ease the frenzied Saul. In the whole pageantry of art, André Malraux finds the assurance that his demon will stay with him, and keep him wide awake.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

SOME USES AND FAILURES OF FEELING*

The sense of how much any poem is at the mercy of large sightless shifts in feeling outside the poet's will or the exigencies of his poem mocks us who were brought up to regard poems as structures, that is in their aspect of autonomy taken as a total definition. The concept of structure has been a handsome and useful fiction, sustaining two, perhaps three generations of poets in the style to which we have become accustomed, but it begins, I think, to assume already a slight air of the old-fashioned; defending it we seem inevitably—a little truculent. For we submit now, willing or not, to a revolution in sensibility, called sometimes with moderate accuracy neo-Romanticism, which involves in the aspect these poets chiefly illuminate a restoration to legitimacy of the more dangerous uses of emotion and the consequent difficulty in the discrimination of sentimentality. There is a point at which that revolution is self-conscious, interested in giving itself names and canonizing forerunners, but almost everywhere its pressures are manifest, at least as distortion or dismay, and it forces us uneasily to recognize the sense in which the poem is spectacularly not autonomous, but must yield to changing fashions in emotion, themselves prompted by inscrutable adjustments in the gross social mind that does not feel responsible for, or indeed even interested in, the production of poetry.

It is among the Young, of course, and those who identify themselves with their newer strategies: the disavowal of violence, the abdication from the state, the idol-ization of sex, that the new sensibility is, with a certain inevitable callowness, defined. The jacket blurb on William Everson's book (a magnificent piece of printing, which oddly asserts in

---

* THE RESIDUAL YEARS. By William Everson. New Directions. $3.00.
LOSSES. By Randall Jarrell. Harcourt, Brace. $2.00.
THE DISPOSSESSED. By John Berryman. Sloane. $2.50.
PATERSON (BOOK TWO). By William Carlos Williams. New Directions. $3.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its typography the form his verse intrinsically denies, and raises the intriguing digressive problem of the fascination which printing, the first mass-production industry, has for the anarcho-pacifist) is a kind of manifesto: poems are to be no longer "abstract aesthetic objects," but intimate speech, sensuous and passionate. The paired adjectives suggest, of course, Milton, but it is D. H. Lawrence, via Rexroth and Patchen, who is actually invoked, and we should perhaps read for the more conventional pair—phallic and sentimental. Now there are possible profitable revivals of Lawrence as a poet, I am sure, particularly those that would lead to a contemplation of his extraordinary conquests of tone, or his restoration of a faith in the symbolic and sacramental importance of beasts and plants. But for Everson, at least, Lawrence serves primarily as a guarantor for the transference of bad writing, that is to say, flagrant sentimentalizing about, copulation from prose to what is, presumably, verse. Neither Everson's ideas about the taking of life, nor his feelings about sex are in themselves, though he would obviously be hard to convince on this score, interesting (with the exception of an episode in the second part of his longest poem "Chronicle of Division," in which the meanings of adultery are somewhat subtly extended), and they are unhappily not transmuted into poems—a process which Everson understands, I think unfortunately, not as a victory over language, but over himself. He is, moreover, too modest (lucidity is his moderate program) to achieve the successes of such English fellow-travellers in emotional excess as Dylan Thomas, eschewing the spectacular and dynamic metaphor for the image of field and flower, open and usual, to illuminate his limited themes: the scared hatred and veneration of sex, and the queasy fear of violence that rides a new generation as the fear of innocence and gentleness once rode an earlier.

In the end, his poems are *parasitic*; they define themselves negatively against the convention of the last generation, what he, or his publisher, chooses to call "emasculated imitations of John Donne"—but it is only against our awareness of that "academic" tradition which he does not fail to evoke in deploring, that his verse attains even vicarious substance.

The failure of feeling is in Everson at any rate principled, and one has the feeling that there is not a conspicuous waste of talent involved (what does he have to lose?); but the uncertainty, the flaccidity of feeling in Randall Jarrell's new book *Losses* is more distressing. For here is a poet with a delicate and daring sense of the language, and even an acute political intelligence, not disjoined from his poetry, but capable

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of fixing in verse of absolute legitimacy a perception, nervous and acute, of our difficult and ambiguous relation to the state. For this it is impossible, I think, to admire him too much, and in the present volume there are things, "Lines" in particular, that evoke that relationship with a successful pathos. But there are other poems included, so patently false in feeling that the language and structure are destroyed utterly; in the end one is shocked by so blatant a lack of discrimination. From the closing lines of "A Camp in the Prussian Forest" one begins to grow uneasy.

. . . and one last breath
Curls from the monstrous chimney . . . I laugh aloud
Again and again;
The star laughs from its rotting shroud
Of flesh. O star of men!

Notice the forced tone, the flat compelling adjectives, the sense of strain. One begins by thinking that it is perhaps the subject, the inordinate terror of the Jewish plight, that is essentially not amenable to controlled comment; but there are other poems on other subjects that fail in similar ways: "O My Name it is Sam Hall" and "Money," for instance, the latter an unformulated piece, with all the grossness of feeling, the obvious irony of an Edgar Lee Masters.

What is the matter? Unlike Everson, Jarrell has basically a regard for form, but a kind of restless uneasy regard agitated by what seems a fear of committing himself to a final rhetoric, which eventuates in his not having what can properly be called a style, a voice of his own at all. *Little Friend, Little Friend,* his last book, seemed to have achieved a single idiom, but it was perhaps after all only a unity of subject, a subject that survives a little way into this book: the anguished comradeship of the war, but gives way to others: the remembering of the dead, the disasters of children, the mediation between the poles of hope and sleep—but whose is the speaking voice? We hear echoes, reminiscences of ambiguous import: Masters in "Money," Frost in "A Country Life," Ransom in "Lady Bates"—it is not, of course, a question of undigested influences in a third volume, but of a distraught quest, an uncertainty, and an evasion of a certain ultimate responsibility. Through this gap of hesitation, the ruinous pressure of our growing context of sentimentality assails Jarrell's integrity and our possibilities of response.

John Berryman puts up, I feel, a better struggle. His is a first book patiently garnered, and without the unevenness which results from Jarrell's obvious impatience to fill up another volume, but there is more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than that. In a way he is the most conservative of the three poets at whom we are looking, closest to the tradition of structure and the aesthetic object, but for him, too, there is no way of utterly evading the perils of the current necessity to extend the poem's range of feeling. The simple (as we say condescendingly) love lyric alone poses problems for whose answer we thumb in vain the Eliotic glossary, the emendations by Auden. But the triumphs of love demand these days celebration along with its failures, and marriage becomes improbably as exigent an occasion for verse as one's own birthday or the year's turn. In "Canto Amor" and elsewhere, Berryman worries the kind of feeling that was just a little while ago an aesthetic indecency; the poem itself is one of his less comfortable efforts, for the possible vocabularies for such themes are not yet sufficiently stable, but neither there nor elsewhere in his book does Berryman lapse into inauthenticity of feeling. In some of his very latest poems, one is perhaps too aware that Berryman has a problem of expression, and we resent the betrayal of its existence (the felt concern with tightness in such a poem as "Narcissus Moving," for example), as we flinch at an unlooked-for confidence. But such poems as "Boston Common" with its admirable opening, or "The Enemies of Angels," which cannot be quoted but must be read all of a piece, seem to me to sustain a complexity of tone, a controlled ambivalence (based in part on an unerring instinct for levels of usage and their combinations) that is wholly satisfying.

In this context of shifting feeling William Carlos Williams assumes a new meaning; and it is fitting that he consummate at this precise moment his life's work with the appearance (this is the second volume; there are two more to go) of his long poem *Paterson,* parts of which have been appearing over the last twenty years.

For Williams has long been testifying to the uses of sentimentality. He is, in a sense, the Dashiell Hammett of American poetry; there exists in his work the precise mixture of realism and sentimentality, the masculine soupiness under the hardboiled surfaces ("The Raper from Passenack" defines in a short lyric all that James M. Cain was ever after) of the boys in the back room. "Noble," he says someplace in praise of another poet, "has become No Bull!" And that's Bill all over.

It is good for us, I think, to see Williams in such a setting (though it is by no means the whole truth about him), for his reputation has flourished among those who have despised manifestations of the same complex of feeling in prose fiction—and Williams has in the meantime attained the status of a Grand Old Man, a survivor, who saw the young

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ezra plain, who dates back to the almost unimaginable heyday of Imagism, and who has persisted (unlike the Hammetts, to be sure), uncommercialized, doggedly outliving the little reviews that have continued to print him. That modernist poetry has already survived long enough to have produced Old Men, is a fact that in itself constantly astounds us, and we fail perhaps to evaluate them precisely, carried away by our adulation of them as original Witnesses.

But it is with Williams' unswerving sentimentality, his role of the hard-shelled doctor with the secret sympathetic heart, that we must begin: his sentimentalization of the working-class, bulls, the New Jersey landscape—and the balancing crustiness: the crabbed forms, the use of anti-poetic detail, the guttural grunts, the constant self-mockery, in short, the attributes of realism.

That we have had only this one respectable realistic poet in twentieth-century America confuses us; we are always lumping Williams with the wrong people, for it seems utterly improbable that one highly admired by, say, Wallace Stevens, could have radically less in common with him than with the obsolescent Carl Sandburg—and, of course, there is the bent and coloration given once and for all to the realism of Williams by the Imagist movement and the Japanese short poem as they imperfectly understood it. "Imagism"—the word comes up out of that darkness in which we store a handy vocabulary for discussing (if improbably pushed to it) what no longer interests us—and clinging to it the dead and the mad and the honest: Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound and W. C. Williams. Well, we like to think of Pound; madness has been at least optional among poets for a long time—but Amy Lowell!

Yet we cannot reject what Williams' astonishing persistence evokes —the questionable ghost of *vers libre,* the tyranny of the eye. The realist is ultimately the *voyeur*—for seeing is the most literal of the senses, the remotest from abstract or symbolic thought ("No ideas but in things," Williams intones at the beginning of *Paterson,* his lifelong credo), and it is the happiest of coincidences that the Hammett hero is the Private Eye, precisely as in the center of Williams' long poem the watcher whose vision makes the body of his world: the Shamus, the Private Eye, unnoticed epiphanies imbedded in our speech.

What the exploitation of that single sense, plus an unmitigated honesty, can do, Williams has done all right, and the simple devotion to seeing gives to some of his poems a magnificent, a manic vividness. But how far can you go on *one* sense! This is not quite fair, perhaps; though the visual obsesses Williams, sounds occasionally touch him: the noise of water, the mythic pissing of his Falls, grunts, the thick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voices of his wise wops talking, but there is no song in him. His entirely visual concept of poetic form inhibits what incipient melody comes (a few honorable exceptions, noticeably some stanzas from the center of the Beautiful Thing sequence in *Paterson II*, come to mind); he pursues absolutely the seen poem: speech that rejects the illusion of being heard; lines broken on the page regardless of cadence to make the eye's pattern or emulate plastic form; at last, the absurd periods set off by chaste white space . , as if they were the poem ultimately reduced and framed by a respectful silence.

It was, I suppose, Pound who started it all, or rather through him Ernest Fenellosa with his Sinologist's myth of the Ideograph: the presumed unity in Oriental verse of the drawn shape of the characters and the poem as sound, as sense. But proposed in our world where not the brush, intimate with the hand, but a remote machine composes the poem on the page, there is an inevitable air of nostalgia, or even parody about the attempt to unify the seen and heard forms of the poem—and in the end what is involved is a kind of betrayal, a surrender to typography of music and resonance:

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Which is a parody of Williams, to be sure, but oddly enough, written by Williams himself in his pursuit of the ultimate, the utopian Skinny Poem; beyond this there is only

* * *
* S *
* O *
* D *
* A *
* * *

whose obvious aspiration toward the phallic (think of it up or down,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tumescence or detumescence) perhaps defines an ulterior meaning of Williams' form.

What on the face of it seems more incredible than that the supreme practitioner of the reduced poem among us should be tempted toward the Long Poem; what seems less probable than his success, especially when he proposes, who has fled all but the sentimental-ironic picture, a dissertation on the mythic city and the definition of man—tempted toward philosophy as well as discursiveness. And yet here in hand is the second volume of *Paterson,* already substantially realized, in the most literal sense—a wonder! To be sure, there was a form ready to solve the dilemma of the short breath and the long intent without teaching an old dog new tricks of substantial structure; the pattern had long been set for what I suppose we might as well call the Ezra-istic poem: the collage of fragments whose architecture is a continuing irony of disjunction, set once and for all when Pound revised for Eliot *The Wasteland,* confirmed in Pound's own *Cantos* and in *The Bridge* of Hart Crane. It has been a long time since any serious poet among us has attempted any other strategy for the long poem—and we recognize the convention in Williams, adhered to with a basic conservatism that gives his poem a classic, an expected air. Here are the rapid shifts in point of view, the urban subject, the intruded quotations, the counterpoint of a formal diction and the overheard brutalities of common speech; here are the harsh distorted forms and the Greek allusion to justify the fallacy of imitative form (sufficient unto the day is the incoherence thereof) that prompts them.

It is so far a work with real virtues, above all a kind of unflagging candor, a freshness of vision from which Williams astonishingly does not wither, and all the charm of a personality that at his age he can afford to inflict upon us with a lucid self-confidence unavailable to the young. He is, as we say, a self-made man. There is a certain appeal too in his conjunction of a radical vagueness of ideas and a sensual precision, real charm in his respect for language, his ironic and tender regionalism. But the poem's faults are even now apparent, disturbing: the lack of a felt necessity in its transitions and conjunctions, and a pervading wilfulness, a self-indulgence most usually discreet, but occasionally blatant as in its injection into the work's progress of some old letter given at needless length, or even an impassioned irrelevance about Lilienthal and the "guilty bastards" in our Senate completely out of the poem's time, assailing its fictive integrity. It is doubtful if in the end the total credibility of the poem can survive such lapses; if we think even for a moment, "Padding!"—all is imperilled. Besides, the old faults persist: the polar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

failures of flatness and sentimentality, the philosophical weakness, the impulse to subsume everything into sight.

Of one thing I am sure: that there is no point in being as extravagantly kind to Williams as the reviewers apparently were to the first volume of *Paterson*. A muddled sort of sentiment seems to me to blur any possibility of definition in the page-full of excerpts from critics New Directions sends along with this volume to bully us by creating an atmosphere in which any dissent from absolute enthusiasm appears an impiety. To be sure, we owe something to the conscientious practitioner who has survived our own vagaries of taste through half a dozen minor aesthetic revolutions, but what we owe him is, I suspect, a devotion equal to his own, but in our case turned to the difficult and sometimes impious business of discrimination.

Leslie A. Fiedler

BACK ISSUES OF PR

now available at reduced prices—30c each (regular price 50c)
Any four of the following for $1.00

- ☐ **JANUARY 1948:** Jean-Paul Sartre—**What is Literature?**; Arthur Koestler—**London Letter**; Marcel Proust—**Filial Sentiments of a Parricide.**
- ☐ **FEBRUARY 1948:** Mary McCarthy—**The Cicerone**; Saul Bellow—**A Letter from Spain**; Robert Warshow—**The Gangster as Tragic Hero.**
- ☐ **MARCH 1948:** Delmore Schwartz—**The World is a Wedding**; Jean-Paul Sartre—**For Whom Does One Write?**; Clement Greenberg—**The Decline of Cubism.**
- ☐ **APRIL 1948:** André Malraux and James Burnham—**The Double Crisis** (a dialogue); Lionel Trilling—**Sex and Science: The Kinsey Report**; Irving Howe—**Sherwood Anderson: The Unavailable Self.**
- ☐ **MAY 1948:** Philip Rahv—**Disillusionment and Socialism**; Josephine Herbst—**Miss Porter and Miss Stein**; Nicolas Nabokov—**The Cult of Atonality**; Weldon Kees—**Muskrat Ramble.**

PARTISAN REVIEW, 1545 Broadway, New York 19

I enclose ..... for the back issues checked above.

NAME_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ ZONE____ STATE_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SOVIET LABOR AND WESTERN HORROR

TELL THE WEST. By Jerzy Gliksman. Gresham Press. $3.75.

The pain caused by stones in the gall bladder or the kidney can be the most excruciating known to human beings. But one may tell the sufferer, he ought to consider himself lucky it's not cancer. It is in this sense that the Russian concentration camps are milder than the German. The two basic methods of totalitarian coercion are terror and privation: the Soviets have had much less to do than the Nazis with the former. But this is merely to say that they know how to make privation do the job; the fact that it's usually a different job, a political one, and that the Russians are not out to exterminate whole populations as such or practise torture for the fun of it, is not a great advantage to the prisoner, to whom all that such magnanimity means is that he shall be executed for political reasons or be worked to death. Concretely, how much better off were Ehrlich and Alter for being murdered because they were socialists and not because they were Jews?

Jerzy Gliksman was the half-brother of Victor Alter, the Polish-Jewish *Bund* leader. He was arrested in Russian-occupied Poland in October, 1939; after the NKVD failed to obtain from Gliksman a confession that would incriminate his brother and his friends, he was released in the hope that he would lead a Soviet tail to his comrades. He shook off the NKVD agent by escaping to another city but was rearrested in March of the following year while attempting to steal across the border into Lithuania. Until August, 1941, he was a political prisoner of the Soviet Union; together with thousands of Russian and Polish nationals he was detained in cellars and jails, transported by cattle-car to the transfer camp, Kotlas, and finally shipped to the "Corrective Labor Camp," UKHTIZHMLAG, in the northeastern, subarctic Republic of Komi, where he began serving a five-year sentence by felling trees in weather as cold as -50° F., and was employed, when his health was seriously impaired, at various other, though lighter, corrective tasks, until a Soviet decree freed the Poles two months after Hitler's invasion of Russia.

This is one of the few first-hand accounts we have of life in Soviet prisons and slave-labor camps. Gliksman makes no observations on Russian politics; his book is concerned merely with reliving an injurious experience—it does so often in extremely painful detail—that we may know what it was like for him and what it is like to the present day for millions of other prisoners. But *Tell the West,* as do all reports

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of its kind, provides a fundamental text of modern politics. It is from such sources that we learn what is in fact the dominion of government: the extent of the state and of its penetration into the lives of its subjects, its power *over* them and *in* them.

On the day of his first arrest, Gliksman was kept waiting in the corridor of NKVD headquarters in Kovel.

> The hours passed, but I was still not without hope that I would be freed. It seemed that my optimism was justified by logical considerations. Although I well knew that the NKVD organization was harsh and pitiless; although I knew of the Moscow Trials, of death sentences, deportations, terror, and so forth, still, I thought, people were not arrested, even in Russia, for no reason whatever. And, anyhow, what could they possibly have against me? I had been a Socialist all my life, and I had never shown any enmity towards the Soviet Union. And right here around me, on the corridor walls, there hung pictures of the theorists of Socialism—Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—whose writings I cherished so dearly. Well-known slogans, in which I, too, had believed since my early youth, screamed from posters and red inscriptions on the walls. "Workers of the World, Unite!" I read in large letters right above my head. I could not believe that these did not mean what they said, and I became heartened.

The Soviet Union is fortunate in having in its service the myth of its ultimate, however small, generosity to the spirit of socialism. There is a "still," an "after all," that works in its favor, even among people who know of the Moscow Trials, etc.; thus it obtains representation in the hearts of those whose heads know better. The victims continue to hope; their hope is worthless, it is perhaps worse than none at all, for so long as the myth and the hope based on it continue to work, the totalitarian state continues to have power *in* the men who are at its mercy. A family tie, an incestuous bond. The fact that there is so little rebellion in the prison camps may not only be due to the harshness and efficiency of repressive measures; there is also the authority of the socialist myth among socialists. Their humiliation is all the greater for coming from so close a source.

But one is vulnerable merely in virtue of having had a childhood. Prison—and camp—regime breaks down the prisoner's morale by attacking precisely those habits, formed in childhood, on which the dignity, decency and self-respect of the subsequent character have been based. Personal cleanliness in body, linens and toilet, the discipline of controlling and satisfying the appetite in a regular way, the belief in one's right to a certain amount of privacy and the accompanying respect for the same right in others, and the satisfaction we are encouraged to feel in our ability to meet the standard social requirements at all the levels, from sphincter control and hygiene up through the ethical and intellectual formations, fair play, justice, etc.—all this is systematically

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

violated in jail and camp by the rotten and inadequate food, the starvation, the repulsive facilities, the filth, the overcrowding in living and sleeping quarters (planks, arranged in tiers, on which so many sleep pressed together in rows that it is impossible for the sleepers to turn over, one at a time, when their sides are cramped; several times a night one of the jailed gives the command and all the rows turn simultaneously), the killing pace at which work is exacted and the murderous, impossible quotas, the bribing and thieving and informing, the constant subjection to ruthless and arbitrary treatment by the guards for the least (or suspected or falsely rumored) infraction or to bullying by the criminal element, whose brutality is condoned or encouraged by the camp authorities. Few men who have been brought up according to civilized standards can withstand such treatment without breaking down, without surrendering the integrity and self-respect which is the legitimate pride of us all. And what is true of the jailed is true of the jailers. A totalitarian society is one in which the mass of men is forced to recapitulate the early terrors, as in a waking nightmare, a nightmare from which one cannot awake because it is the reality. A prison camp is a kindergarten in a slaughterhouse, in which the penned must go round and round in a forced march to childhood, regressing to what they never were (the vacated possibilities between the first elements and the later formations of character realized, and the realized possiblities, which gave the mature person his amplitude, wiped out) that there may remain no interval of time or reflection between the word of authority and the obedience. And there is no redress, as to a righteous politics, a justice in the minds and wills of others, which was available even in the Tsars' days. This *is* Soviet politics; it is also the level and the limit to which all politics today can move.

So much we know. But we must be careful in reading this appeal to the West, not to make too much of our westernness; it is not synonymous with democracy—Germany is also West—and in itself it is proof against nothing. The character of an American and the values—"We hold these truths to be self-evident"—to which it conforms can be altered by the same methods. In fact, the immediate quality of American life has often impressed observers, our own and from foreign countries, with its violence and brutality, far more violent than the Germany which, by this impression, should have been a safe bet against succumbing to terror before our own country. It won't hurt to rehearse this; we have grown so used to the thicker layers of our atmosphere, we sometimes forget what we breathe. The South; but what about race riots in the North, and the brutality of American cops, urban and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rural, the whole country over, and detention camps for Japanese and CO's and anti-Semitism and xenophobia and vigilantism and witch-hunts and the insane hatred that one can see mounting, holding back, growing into the sub-acute intelligence of sadism with its dead-right instinct for producing the crisis and explosion it means to produce?

Our democratic Government holds (thank God or history) these forces checked, the democratic system relieves some pressures, exerts a counterpressure against others, and we have a tradition of due process of law, of equality and a humane laissez faire, all of which has thus far been our protection. But it is impossible to believe, from what politics has already disclosed about itself, that a constitutional warrant is sure; it is no more than surface. The strength of any political surface depends on the deeper forces that attach themselves to it from the under side, by growing up to meet it and support it. Ultimately, the safety of a system demands the widespread existence among the people of a character structure which conforms, in impulse, values, in the basic orientation and training, to the values that are asserted at the surface. Our surface is cracked, our character-structure, split. The totalitarian countries, on the other hand, have shown that such conformity between value and character is more than a theoretical possibility for tyrannous regimes. Our citizens, too, were once children, trained to potty, knife and fork, to good manners and respect for authority. They, too can be demolished. What stands in the way of demolition is a system of politics which in turn draws its strength from the character of its people—a circle which is liable to become vicious. The "West" is no sure thing.

But by all means tell the West. It is as much for our own good as for theirs, the slaves lingering in their sub-arctic *lager* who made this request of Gliksman when his freedom was restored, that the truth about Soviet labor camps must be told. The West defends itself against such knowledge (an extreme but common form of defense, observable among fellow-travelers, is to run in the direction of the threat, to be absorbed by it and thus to pass from its view). The West does not want to hear such things. This is bad. What is worse is that when the West is forced to hear, it reacts only with horror. It is a first horror, a horror of feigned innocence, whose real recoil is not from the thing revealed but from the excitement that the revelation produces, the unconscious recognition that we ourselves are capable of suffering and inflicting the same agony. This is dangerous, it can lead directly to the creation of the evil. We must be made to release our first horror, to come to the awareness that yes, of course, we too are capable and susceptible, all of existing humanity is susceptible. The admission thus wrenched from conscience

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leaves a place for knowledge to fill—the truth about today's politics in the extreme, that its scope is unlimited, that it has entered and possessed every inch of the private person, that it has nothing left to do with the pieties of the surface formulations. We will be better off for being thus disabused; and then there will be more point in telling the West. Even so, we will have a long stretch to cover. The full distance—a politics in which such things as in the Soviet Union not only do not occur, but are impossible. But this is as much as to say, a new humanity: a society and a human character-structure, proof against outrage. Which is what was once meant by socialism. It is a long way off, further than ever, but we may at least know we're on the right track when we no longer need defend ourselves against the horror of contemporary politics, because our own brutal susceptibility will have diminished; and when we begin to feel, to our surprise, less and less horror and more and more of mere contempt (nothing else will be necessary) for men who do such violence—and at last, any violence—to other men.

Isaac Rosenfeld

LAWRENCE R. MAXWELL — BOOKS

Specializing in

THEATRE - DANCE - FILM - MUSIC - EXPERIMENTAL WRITING - PSYCHOANALYSIS and PSYCHIATRY

announces

RECENT AND FORTHCOMING TITLES OF UNUSUAL INTEREST

Williams. Paterson (Book Two)	3.00
Jeffers. The Double Axe and Other Poems	2.75
Camus. Two Plays: Caligula and Cross Purpose	3.00
Camus. The Plague	3.00
Gide. The Immoralist	2.50
Lindgren. Art of the Film	4.50
Pattison. Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance	7.25
Tyrwhitt-Drake. The English Circus and Fair Ground	6.00
Gramophone Shop Encyclopedia of Recorded Music	5.00
Stanislavski. An Actor Prepares	3.00
Proust. Pleasures and Regrets	2.75
Reik. Listening with the Third Ear	6.00
de Beauvoir. The Blood of Others	3.00
Greene. The Heart of the Matter	3.00
Arbeau. Orchesography. A Manual of 15th & 16th Century Dances	10.00
Special Theatre Issue of "Masques," covering the Paris Stage for 1946-47. About 100 pages, lavishly illustrated	2.50

Lists No. 5 (Dancers and Dancing) and 6 (Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis) sent on request.

45 CHRISTOPHER STREET, NEW YORK CITY 14. • WA. 9-3494

Open 2 to 10 Daily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LOVELESS LOVE

THE HEART OF THE MATTER. By Graham Greene. Viking. $3.00.

"Do you love me, Ticki?"
"What do you think?"
"Say it, one likes to hear it—even if it isn't true."
"I love you, Louise. Of course, it's true."

This exhausted domestic dialogue is used with remarkable power in Graham Greene's new novel, *The Heart of the Matter.* Greene has stolen the trivial chatter of marriage from Noel Coward and given it an existential, neo-Catholic varnish, the high polish of fear and trembling and sickness unto death. The petulant archaisms, the white lies, are profanations of the lost ability to love; they bring moral fatigue, not satisfaction ("Say it again, darling!"). The nasty emptiness of the evening compliment ("My dear, how absurd you are. I've never known anyone with so many friends"); the anxiety that one's desperate separateness will be noticed ("He flinched a little away from her, and then hurriedly in case she had noticed lifted her damp hand and kissed the palm"); the nervous wretchedness of politeness; the anguish edging outrageous promises to provide for another's happiness ("Don't worry. I'll find a way, dear")—in all of this dry, light material Greene finds the terror of, to use Marianne Moore's phrase, that "interesting impossibility," marriage and ideal love.

Scobie, an official in a British-governed town on the west coast of Africa, does not love his wife and so the reckless, embarrassing language of marriage, the optimistic accent, fill him with a dread of such great dimensions that each expected deception appears as a terrible crime. The vocabulary of Scobie's heart is responsibility, self-hatred, anxiety, and guilt. There is a scalding monotony and desperation in his life because of his supererogatory sense of pity. Scobie is mild, dutiful, just, a Catholic who loves God with the bitter passion that has died out in his earthly attachments. All of his secular life is contained in his reluctance to inflict pain. He suffers the agonies of the dinner table and the bedroom as if they were an immense crime against God; his wife's tears are a death sentence; her inevitable moments of ugliness fill him with the "pathos of her unattractiveness"; her absurdity, a malicious remark at her expense arouse in him a bereaved, tragic defense of the right of everyone to live without scorn. With intense seriousness he accepts the burden of her dissatisfaction as his due responsibility. With a kind of fury he compromises his deepest principles to get the money for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her voyage to South Africa. After she has gone, he expects to find peace in his loneliness, in the honesty of being accountable only to himself, but, instead, and without wishing it, he becomes involved in a love affair. Again his sharpest emotion is pity; again, to avoid pain, he is brought back to the painful depths of "I love you" and "I'll never leave you." His very act of adultery is a sin which he cannot repent without dishonoring his mistress; he cannot make the required religious effort to abandon the relationship without bringing unhappiness to the woman who depends upon him. His wife returns and to please her he takes Mass, though in a state of mortal sin. His love of God and his duty to life conflict at every point. At last he commits suicide, sacrifices his soul to be relieved of the torture of sacrificing others.

Greene finds in this weary, sad sinner a great religious personality. Scobie is ordinary, inconspicuous, hiding his profound struggle behind his decent, rather colorless appearance. Apparently Greene had a figure in mind like the knight of faith, of whom Kierkegaard said, "Good Lord, is this the man? Is it really he? Why, he looks like a tax-collector!"

"I think he loved God," the priest says, after Scobie's impious death. This mystical resolution, weak and perverse as it is, is the only thing the Catholic novelist can salvage out of the modern, secular ruins in which he feels compelled to place his hero. There is a snobbishness in serious Catholic writers. They are bored with the pious, the regular devotions, the bland submissiveness—modern man is so much more "interesting." These writers want multiplicity, waywardness, spiritual torment, weakness and pride; they are in love with sin and intimate with spirituality only as the capacity for suffering from weaknesses. Toward the conventionally pious they are inattentive and Greene is positively churlish. Sebastian in *Brideshead Revisted* is a drunkard, neurotically enslaved to an evil German boy, and yet he is "holy." Waugh says, "He'll develop little eccentricities of devotion, intense personal cults of his own; he'll be found in the chapel at odd times and missed when he's expected. Then one morning, after one of his drinking bouts, he'll be picked up at the gate dying, and show by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments. It's not such a bad way of getting through one's life."

Greene, in the dramatic self-slaughter, pushes personal heresy to the limits with a greediness that is convincing neither as fiction nor as religion. His hero must be everything at once. He must not only be a sinner, but must commit the worst sin, and with paradox upon paradox, be nearer to grace than anyone else. Mrs. Scobie, a devoted Catholic, is "furiously" reprimanded by the priest for her impudence in assuming

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Scobie will be damned forever. She is guilty of the most sluggish literal-mindedness.

Scobie cannot be understood, cannot be reached or commented upon in terms of psychology or theology. His feeling of responsibility to others approaches arrogance; his death is almost frivolous since it is his last act of pity for a wife whose needs are expressed, "Oh, Ticki, Ticki, you won't leave me ever, will you? I haven't got any friends—not since the Tom Barlows went away." As Mary McCarthy wrote about an earlier novel of Greene's, "One cannot imagine a character whose behavior is wholly governed by pity, and one feels that Greene, in pretending that it is possible, is being pious and insincere."

And yet, in spite of Greene's obstinate extension of one emotion, he has done a great deal with Scobie's pity, his loveless love, his anguish over the uncommitted, unmarried part of himself. *The Heart of the Matter* is interesting and serious for its plain, grim understanding of the moral pain of exaggerated sentiment, the tragic heroism of watching over another's life.

Elizabeth Hardwick

GBM The Best In Modern Art and Literature by Promising Unknowns and Established Moderns.

AUDEN (W. H.), SHAPIRO (Karl), STAUFFER (D. A.), and ARNHEIM (R.), POETS AT WORK. Essays on Contemporary Poetry. $2.75

HEVESI (J. L.) Edt. ESSAYS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE Contributions by Proust, Valery, Sartre, others $4.25

HYMAN (Stanley E.) THE ARMED VISION. Study In Methods of Modern Literary Criticism as Exemplified In Work of Eliot, Caudwell, Blackmur, etc. $5.00

GIVENS (Seon) Edt. JAMES JOYCE: TWO DECADES OF CRITICISM. Little Mag Articles Including Eliot, Stuart Gilbert, Eugene Jolas, Others. $5.00

O'CONNOR (William Van) Edt. FORMS OF MODERN FICTION. Problems of Form and Technique Analyzed by Trilling, Penn Warren, Mark Schorer, Others $4.75

ORPHEUS. Yearbook of Arts and Letters In England and the Continent Edt. by John Lehmann. $4.00

GOTHAM BOOK MART
41 West 47th St., New York 19, N. Y.

A limited number of copies of PORNOGRAPHY AND OBSCENITY by *D. H. Lawrence, long out of print and scarce, has just been issued with a new preface by Florenz Arslen-Hasratoff.*
ONE DOLLAR EACH, POST FREE FROM

THE ALICAT BOOK SHOP
287 South Broadway, Yonkers 5, N. Y.

SPANISH
PORTUGUESE
FRENCH • RUSSIAN

In your own home learn to speak any of 29 languages by the world-famous LINGUAPHONE CONVERSATIONAL METHOD...quickly, easily, correctly. Made by noted language teachers; endorsed by educators; used in colleges and by thousands of home-study students. Send for FREE book. Call for FREE demonstration.

LINGUAPHONE INSTITUTE
70 RCA Bldg., N.Y. 20, CI-7-0830

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

THE TOYNBEE QUESTION

Sirs:

Encouraged by Mr. R. W. Flint's letter in the latest issue of P.R., I must add my voice to his in criticizing the approach of the editors of P.R. toward the crisis of our particular age. In Professor Hook's excellent article on Toynbee's historical approach, he makes as "revealing" a statement about the liberal approach to salvation as he finds Toynbee has made on the Christian approach. "(Toynbee) nowhere comes to grips with the view that the spiritual crisis of our time, as of other times, is a consequence of profound dislocations in economic and social institutions, and that the cure of the business cycle will affect the incidence of neurotic anxieties over salvation much more decisively than spiritual therapy will affect the business cycle."

This is a very carefully worded sentence and one can hardly disagree with its central point concerning Toynbee, that saving souls will not necessarily save society. No. Toynbee's attempt to make an other-worldly religion efficacious in this world's social salvation is another species of that "modernism" which Santayana so effectively demolished in *Winds of Doctrine* many years ago. However, Professor Hook is accepting the Toynbee premiss that spiritual and political salvation are akin. He merely differs on the method of achieving it. This is exactly the same premiss that is accepted by Henry Wallace and his cohorts and leads to the "ideological partisanship" that Professor Trilling so justly decries. But, you may say, *our* partisanship is for a peaceful, moderate socialist change in society which will allow as many persons as possible a fair *chance* for salvation. Fair enough, but this is not the burden of the arguments of the writers in your magazine. The underlying assumption seems to be, "let's improve society first, then we can think about salvation." But John the Baptist pointed out some time ago, "repent, for the end of the world is at hand"; what you don't seem to realize is that the end of the world is always at hand. Keep striving for a rational and practical solution to political difficulties and I'm with you all the way, but please don't confuse political with spiritual salvation. Don't even *assume* that the spiritual is partly dependent on the political (even though it might be) because if you do you will begin to forget their essential distinction and then you will never be saved.

New York City **C. Roland Wagner**

Sirs:

There is nothing particularly offensive about debunking, or even in jumping from The Bandwagon with as loud a splash as possible; but really, Mr. Sidney Hook's Toynbee appraisal in June's PR was sadly silly, the kind of whine that can pass beneath other people but which somehow irritates my small ear. I feel, simply, that anyone taking on Toynbee and Augustine and Maritain all alump could at least have briefed himself with a mind not *quite* so narrow. Even Mr. Hook's evident fear of the Catholic Church (and who can blame him?—its past: "torture, exploitation, terror and wars of extermination"; its future for us: "a confessor in every concentration camp") should not have damaged ordinary reasoning that much.

Just "what dogmas of Christianity are incompatible with free enterprise or with collectivism?" Mr. Hook inquires, to prove the superfluity of "theological baggage" when searching

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the "brotherhood of man (a brotherhood without a Fatherhood?), democracy, peace, cooperation, economic security. . . ." Essays like his, I admit, make the answer sound foolish, it's so plain, so uncontrived. Too many leaves have hid the trunk, but that answer is—still—"Thou shalt not. . . ."

Lancaster, Pa. E. G. Gallagher

REPLY BY SIDNEY HOOK:

1. In answer to Mr. Wagner's thoughtful letter:

I have no desire to be "saved" but I do not object to other people being "saved," if they feel they have a need for salvation and do not compromise their intellectual and moral integrity in the process.

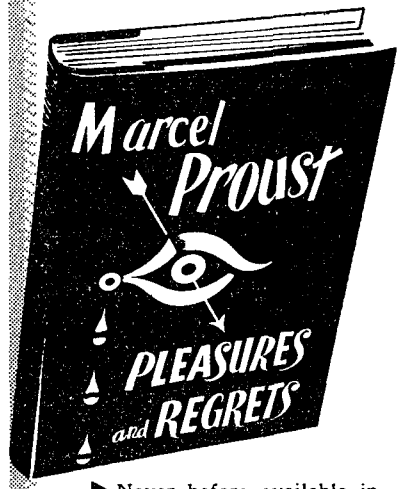
Although the spiritual and social-political aspects are certainly distinguishable, in their causal nexus they are inseparable. The failure to realize this is at the root of many disastrous dualisms between "the inner" and "the outer" in our culture. For example, the decision a person makes to live or to die is a matter of the profoundest spiritual concern. Nonetheless, anyone who has studied the sociology of suicide can predict within certain limits what the incidence of suicide will be under different social and political conditions. The sociological data, of course, is not very relevant in understanding any particular individual struggling in the throes of doubt and self-debate. So long as he is free from external compulsion and is rational, he is to some degree always free to choose. That is why suicide is a moral problem, and why the individual cannot shove off responsibility for his decision upon society. Other illustrations are provided by marriage and divorce, than which there are few questions more personal.

Granted their inseparability, it may be necessary for purposes of analysis

JUST PUBLISHED

The first English translation of the famous first book by

Marcel Proust



▶ Never before available in America—except in expensive, imported French editions. The fabulous tour de force with which Proust made his startling début as a published writer. 55 stories and sketches which foreshadow the major themes of REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST.

Pleasures AND Regrets

(Les Plaisirs et Les Jours)

With the original introduction by

ANATOLE FRANCE

Translation by LOUISE VARÈSE

$2.75 at all bookstores

CROWN PUBLISHERS, 419 Fourth Ave., N.Y. 16

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to distinguish personal from social problems. At the risk of being misunderstood I am prepared to go further. Although social problems arising from defective institutions are causally the most important for purposes of control, from the point of view of individual experience, they are the least interesting. They should be solved in order to extend the area of personal autonomy and increase the diversity of significant human experiences. Deny a people bread and before long almost everyone is reduced to the same animal level of behavior: supply it in abundance and the range of possible experience is extended. Once *social* resources are made freely available, each one becomes responsible for the development of his *inner* resources. I do not mean to suggest here a simple or complete dependence. Even to-day, for many individuals the problems of the social order enter only indirectly and remotely into their lives. It is safe to say that the unhappiest people most readers of PR are acquainted with do not suffer from material want as much as from frustrations that grow out of failure to find a creative vocation or to achieve satisfactory personal relationships or to do a piece of work good enough to withstand criticism. Some of these failures are traceable to faults in our social institutions, some are not.

One final observation. I think there is good evidence that the kind of anxieties from which most people seek salvation to-day either by psychiatry or religion—instead of by Socratic processes of self-knowledge—are in the main an outcome of our irrationally ordered society.

2. As for Mr. Gallagher. He displays not only bad temper but bumptious ignorance. Msgr. Sheen would be ashamed of him. Since when are the Ten Commandments of Moses "dogmas of Christianity?" Worse still, Mr. Gallagher doesn't know the difference between theology and morals. "Thou shalt not steal" is not a proposition of theology but of ethics. "God exists," "The soul is immortal," are propositions of natural theology: "Christ is the Redeemer," etc., is a proposition of sacred theology. My point simply was that no empirical conclusions about the social order were entailed by propositions of either natural or sacred theology.

The root of Mr. Gallagher's confusion is the assumption that the validity of moral propositions (or commands) logically depend upon the "truths" of theology, e.g., that unless God exists, it is not wrong to steal, lie, or murder. This is monstrously false, as St. Thomas could teach him. If Mr. Gallagher really believes it, all we can do is to hope that while others are around, he never loses his faith in God's existence.

New York City Sidney Hook

• *Announcing* •

The 14th $10,000

Harper Prize Novel Contest

DEADLINE June 1, 1949

MANUSCRIPTS may be submitted now and at any time up to the closing date of June 1, 1949. $10,000 will be awarded the prize novel as selected by the judges, who will be:

GLENWAY WESCOTT, novelist, author of *Apartment in Athens, The Grandmothers.*

JOSEPH HENRY JACKSON, literary editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle.*

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, author of *Flowering Judas, The Leaning Tower,* etc.

(*This contest in NOT limited to first novels*)

Write for circular giving full details:

The Harper Prize Novel Contest
Harper & Brothers • 49 E. 33 St.
New York 16, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE ATONAL TRAIL

Sirs:

In his article attacking Schoenberg and atonality (PARTISAN REVIEW, May 1948), Mr. Nabokov says that what escapes me "is the fact that Stravinsky is working in a completely new direction." In order to prove this he says: "Stravinsky is not concerned with the further evolution of harmony, but (1) with the problem of musical time and its measurement, (2) the function of the interval, (3) the extension of a phrase, (4) the juxtaposition in *time* of several melodic lines."

I assure you: there is no need to be a specialist on music in order to perceive the nonsense of such statements.

(1) I fail to see where the problem lies. At any rate, the only way to be concerned with it is to write music and, I confess, that I cannot see Stravinsky's originality in this respect As to the "measurement," if Nabokov refers to a compositional activity, it is obvious that every composer measures musical time in as far as he is concerned with the length and proportions of the various sections of his piece, so that such a statement seems quite senseless. (2) The same may apply here; I should like to add in parentheses that nobody has given greater care to the "function of the interval" than Schoenberg. The 12-tone technique being entirely based on this consideration, a fact which Nabokov seems to ignore. (3) This has been one of the basic principles of musical composition during the last ten centuries, and mentioning it as something particular to a certain composer is just as ridiculous as, let us say, stating that a certain writer is concerned with the usage of nouns and verbs. (4) I should be grateful to Mr. Nabokov if he could let me know where else—except in time—it is possible to juxtapose melodic lines.

So far, however, Mr. Nabokov has only given us a few tautological banalities; in the next sentence he becomes delirious : "The whole question of time + space + linear and chordal harmony which create the fourth dimension of music — rhythm — is the real preoccupation of Stravinsky's art."

How can one add time to space? What has music got to do with space at all? What is linear harmony (the definition of harmony being that it deals with chords)? What is the fourth dimension (I doubt that Mr. Nabokov knows the answer)? How can its presence be explained in music, where there are precisely no dimensions, a dimension being specifically a spatial concept! How can one say that this fourth dimension is *rhythm,* of which a little further, Mr. Nabokov says (correctly for once) that it is one of the three elements of music! Is it then an element or a dimension? How can one become the other and, besides, are not all composers concerned with this element?

Once again, it would be quite simple to show the same confusions and contradictions all through the article, which induces me to draw the following conclusion: the fact that a theoretical defense of a composer who betrays a total creative impotence turns out to be equally impotent, this fact is not astonishing. Thus, by printing Mr. Nabokov's paper, P.R. has contributed greatly to the establishment of a true picture of what generally goes on in the musical world of today. But maybe, just because of this sad state of affairs, there are better and higher tasks for a review which decides to run articles on music and maybe this is mainly what I have been trying to express in this letter.

Rene Leibowitz

Paris, France

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS are accepted for personal and literary services, publishing offers, miscellaneous items appealing to an intellectual audience, jobs wanted, houses for rent, tutoring, and other ideas of a nature suitable to Partisan Review's standards. Rates: 18c *a word, 12 word minimum. Rates for several insertions—12 times* 12c *a word; 6 times* 15c *a word. Date of issue: first of each month. Advertisements must be in and paid for by the 2nd of the month preceding publication. Address Classified Department, Partisan Review, 1545 Broadway, New York 19.*

BOOKS

HARD TO FIND BOOKS LOCATED. Free Library Service. Your Wants Solicited. GEMINI BOOK SERVICE, 46-P Lewis Ave., Brooklyn 6, New York.

LITERARY SERVICES

WE PUBLISH, print and distribute your manuscript in pamphlet and book form. Send for free folder. WILLIAM-FREDERICK PRESS; PAMPHLET DISTRIBUTING CO., Inc., 313 W. 35th St., N.Y.C. 1, LA. 4-0178.

PROFITABLE BOOK PUBLICATION on even the limited sale of your book is possible. Details in our free copy of "We Can Publish Your Book." Dept. P, EXPOSITION PRESS, One Spruce St., N.Y.C. 7

PERIODICALS

THE WESTERN REVIEW. A quarterly of modern literature. Subscription: $1.50. 211 Fraser Hall, Lawrence, Kansas.

EUROPEAN READER of New Statesman & Nation wishes to exchange N.S. & N. for P.R. Partisan Review, Box 10.

RECORDS

F.D. ROOSEVELT'S OWN VOICE . . . Authorized recording of 23 of his most important radio addresses, N.B.C. Incomparable recording, from First Inaugural March 1933 to Jefferson Day Address April 1945. Two de luxe souvenir albums, 12 records, 2 sides, UNBREAKABLE, $24.50 set. For Collectors, Archives, Schools, Speech Students. Linguaphone Institute, 91 RCA Bldg., New York 20, N. Y.

BOOKS TOO EXPENSIVE?

Choose your own and save 25%

Order the book you want.* Pay for it after you get it. Receive 25% credit on its price. Do this four times. Then use your credit for further books.

*No text books or very technical books.

Send for brochure, or order now.

BONUS BOOK CLUB

Dept. R-4

61 WEST 56 ST., NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

The AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

is "the most balanced and comprehensive and perceptive analysis of America yet written by a non-American." —ROGER PIPPETT, *PM*

800 pages $6.50

by **HAROLD J. LASKI**

VIKING

LIBERAL PRESS, INC.

printers of

PARTISAN REVIEW

•

80 FOURTH AVENUE

NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A carefully edited combination of the Quarto and Folio texts of Shakespeare's

HAMLET

with a psycho-analytical study

by DR. ERNEST JONES,

President of the International Psycho-Analytical Association

THIS edition of Hamlet, aimed at presenting the closest approximation to the original text of Shakespeare, was first published this year by the Vision Press, Ltd. of London. It includes 14 full-page and spot drawings made especially for this edition by F. Robert Johnson.

In the important psycho-analytical introduction, called "The Problem of Hamlet and The Oedipus Complex", Dr. Jones sets forth a new explanation of the central mystery in the play—the cause of Hamlet's hesitancy in seeking to revenge his father's murder. Available at your bookseller's for $2.50.

The next two Vision Press volumes to appear later this Spring and Summer, are:

T. S. ELIOT: A Study of His Writings by Several Hands. *Edited by B. Rajan*

THE EAGLE HAS TWO HEADS, *by Jean Cocteau • Adapted by Ronald Duncan*

---

100 YEARS AGO--American writing of 1848

Edited by James P. Wood. Second of *The Centenary Series in American Literature.* This book gives a well-selected cross-section of American literature of 1848, and the ideas which moved and motivated Americans then. Includes Thoreau, James Russell Lowell, Bayard Taylor, Poe, Horace Mann and many others. $5.00

100 YEARS AGO--American writing of 1847

Edited by James P. Wood. A magnificent collection of selections from the best writings of one hundred years ago—including Melville, Cooper, Longfellow, Prescott, Emerson, Agassiz and many others. The first volume in *The Centenary Series in American Literature. Illustrated with woodcuts.* $5.00

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY 153 East 24th Street, New York 10

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Armed Vision

by STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN

A study in the methods of modern literary criticism

This book is an examination of what such critics as Yvor Winters, I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Wilson, William Empson, Van Wyck Brooks, R. P. Blackmur, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Caudwell, Constance Rourke, and many others have believed to be the functions, subject matter, successes, and failures of our most important writings. Of enormous scope and brilliance, it is the product of an absolutely first-rate mind stocked with vast erudition and able to speak clearly, elegantly, and with wit. Reading it gives one many hours of intellectual stimulation of a rare sort and a whole new set of approaches to reading and to evaluation.

"Constantly touches one with its youthful vigor. Hyman's style is straightforward and useful and communicates his intense interest in what he is saying and his desire for intelligence, without distraction. This book is exciting from beginning to end. It is about today without politics."—WALLACE STEVENS

"There is no doubt that the subject has given full scope to a first-rate critical talent."
—ALLEN TATE

$5.00 wherever books are sold

ALFRED A. KNOPF, 501 Madison Avenue, New York 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED